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BATMAN

When Jim Steranko interviewed Bill Finger for his 1970 **HISTORY OF THE COMICS**, Finger told him he got the idea for Batman from the movie, **THE BAT**, which he had seen recently. Bob Kane, who drew the comic book stories, went along with this. Finger was the writer, the man interested in pulp fiction, the guy who did the reading and research. Had Steranko gone a little further with his inquiries, he would have discovered quite a different picture. First off, he would have found that Finger's most immediate source for the shadowy Batman was Walter B. Gibson's character, **THE SHADOW**.

The concept of a shadowy costumed bat man which lead to both Gibson's Shadow and Finger and Kane's Batman came from **THE BAT**, the 1920 Broadway version of Mary Roberts Rinehart's first novel, **THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE**, which began her writing career when it was serialized in **ALL STORY MAGAZINE** from November of 1907 to March of 1908 (v. IX, No. 3). Bobbs-Merrill published **STAIRCASE** in book form in 1908, The Selig Company filmed it in 1915 as a 5 reel silent, and it was reprinted in **MARY ROBERTS RINEHART'S MYSTERY BOOK** in 1930. Rinehart began writing when she was 27, and **STAIRCASE** was *"intended to be a semi-satire on the usual pompous self-important crime story (261),"* but critics and the public took it seriously, so Rinehart accepted the inevitable. She began to dramatize the story in 1917, but was interrupted by the war. In 1918, she returned to the script, working on it while she stayed at the Langton Hotel in New York. *"It was at this time that I decided to invent a master criminal to be called The Bat, and to have the action of the play all occur during one night* (264)."

Rinehart met playright Avery Hopwood in New York and asked him to finish **The Bat**. He was busy, but by March 20 had found time to work out the details of the third act and **The Bat** was ready for the stage. It was produced by Wagenhals and Kemper and opened August 23, 1920, at the Morosco Theater in New York with Harrison Hunter playing the Bat. Hunter died during the run of the play, which was called **A THIEF IN THE NIGHT** when it played Washington, D. C. **THE BAT** was a hit and by 1926, it had been published as a novel by George H. Doran. Dell did the paperback.

United Artists filmed it silent in 1926 as **THE BAT**, then did a sequel, **THE BAT WHISPERS** in 1931. It was remade in color in 1958 with Vincent Price as The Bat.

The idea of a bat man as a vampiric demonic night creature came from Transylvanian folk lore. Rinehart was probably influenced by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's story *Carmilla* from **IN A GLASS DARKLY** (1872) by way of Abraham [Bram] Stoker's 1897 novel, **DRACULA**, though it is quite possible she was familiar with **VARNEY THE VAMPIRE** (1859) or even with **THE VAMPYR** (Pierre Carmouche, Paris, 1920). The idea of a bat creature flitting in and out of a country house in the dark of night to threaten women is retained in **THE BAT**, but the vampirism is dropped in favor of a money motive. **THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE** was a first person ghost story told by elderly Rachel Innes. Her quest for independence through renting a summer house with her nephew and niece forms the core of the story. As Cordelia in **THE BAT**, she remains a strong character, but the integrity of the story is compromised by the addition of The Bat, who is superimposed upon what *was* a tightly structured plot involving a corrupt banker and his nephew. The Bat takes the story too far into the realm of the absurd. We're expected to believe he would even carry live bats on his

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person since he leaves a dead one as his calling card. A burglar is going to carry bats around in his pockets?

Walter Gibson adapted The Bat and turned him into The Shadow who was in turn adapted by Kane and Finger into the comic book Batman. Finger saw the 1926 *film* of **THE BAT** and the *image* of the character stuck in his mind, but he got the *details* used in the comic book stories from Gibson's pulp Shadow stories which he had been reading and hearing on the radio for nearly a decade before he sat down to write The Batman.

The concept of an wealthy aristocrat with a double identity probably came from Baroness Orczy's **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL**, which resulted from a collaboration with her husband, Montague Barstow, and was onstage in London in 1903, novelized by 1905, and filmed in America in 1934. The Pimpernel was Sir Percy Blakeney, who outwitted adversaries like Chauvelin through superior courage and ingenious disguises, all of the time concealing his night time identity from his aristocratic friends as Bruce Wayne would do several decades later.

In **THE SHADOW SCRAPBOOK**, Walter Gibson explains how he developed the character of The Shadow, using Horatio Alger, Jr.'s **RISEN FROM THE RANKS** or **HARRY WALTON'S SUCCESS** (1874) as a model for the first novel. The Alger book had 36 chapters, each 9 pages long, and each with a descriptive line. This worked out to about 75,000 words. Gibson called his first story **THE LIVING SHADOW** and Street and Smith published it in April of 1931. "It introduced the Shadow as a somewhat nebulous figure who moved in and out of the story in such an uncanny fashion that people who encountered him--be they friend or foe--automatically spoke of him as 'The Shadow.' When he did assume a solid form, it was that of a cloaked fighter striking down and scattering men of evil, while at other times he appeared in an unexpected disguise, rescuing friends and agents from seemingly hopeless situations. On such occasions crooks often mistook him for one of themselves or even for their leader, so adept was The Shadow in the art of quick change and make-up (6)." In **THE EYES OF THE SHADOW** (July, 1931), Gibson made his hero a millionaire and gave him "a tower room equipped with all the latest radio gadgets, including some that were not yet invented (6)." The name Cranston came from Houdini's old magic files. Gibson had ghosted a book on the magician. Lamont was a family name from the New York Telephone Directory. The Shadow was on the radio by July 1, 1930, on the Detective Story Hour, sponsored by Street and Smith, which means the character was familiar to a mass audience *before* he appeared in the April 1931 pulp. While Gibson gave credit to Alger for the format he used, he did not credit Rinehart as an immediate source anymore than Finger credited Gibson.

THE LIVING SHADOW is almost a carbon copy of **THE BAT.** Here is the way Rinehart first mentions her character: "Beast, man, or devil? A specter--a flying shadow--*The shadow* of a bat (8)." Again: "The Bat . . . like a bat he chose the night hours for his work of rapine; like a bat he struck and vanished, pouncing noiselessly; like a bat he never showed himself to the face of the day (8)." en fin, "Evil's four hundred chattered, discussed, debated--sent out a thousand invisible tentacles to clutch at a shadow--to turn this shadow and its distorted genius to their own ends (9)." I expect Gibson and Finger were more influenced by **THE BAT** (1926) and **THE BAT WHISPERS** (1931) than the novel, but the connection is clear in either case.

Rinehart even foresaw the faddist possibilities for her character, predicting what would happen to Batman in 1966 when a television show would make him high camp. She wrote in 1926: "Ministers mentioned him in sermons: cranks wrote fanatic letters denouncing him as one of the seven-headed beasts of the Apocalypse, and a forerunner of the end of the world: a popular revue put on a special Bat number wherein eighteen beautiful chorus girls appeared Masked and black-winged in costumes of Brazilian bat fur; there were Bat Club sandwiches, Bat Cigarettes, and a new shade of hosiery called simply and succinctly BAT. He became a fad--a catchword--a national figure. And yet--he was walking Death--cold remorseless. But Death itself had become a toy of publicity (10)."

Rinehart saw her Bat man as a rather romantic figure. The idea of a double identity appeals to a woman, perhaps more than to a man, who has power and status in his own professional life. In her time, women remained in service positions at the very bottom of the corporate ladder. It's only logical to expect women forced to serve to harbor fantasy identities in which they are free to do as they please with their lives. One imagines the Baroness Orczy riding to the rescue on the night wind as The Scarlet Pimpernel. In **THE BAT**, Mary Roberts Rinehart devises a way to have her cake and eat it, too. Her heroine is a wealthy woman who rents a summer house. She receives threatening letters designed to get her to leave, because someone believes the money from a bank robbery has been hidden in the house. She refuses to leave, but invites a detective named Anderson to stay in the house and investigate the threats. Anderson, who works with Chief John Grogan as Bruce Wayne will later work with Commisioner Gordon, wants to go after the Bat because the Bat has killed his friend Wentworth, hence his motive is revenge like that of Finger's Bruce Wayne whose parents were killed by a thief. In the end, the man Cornelia assumed to be Anderson turned out to be the Bat. He had ambushed the real Anderson and tied him up. Throughout the plot, however, it is this 65-year-old woman who thinks it all out and stays ahead of the ingenious Bat. She is the one who triumphs in the end as he is taken off in handcuffs.

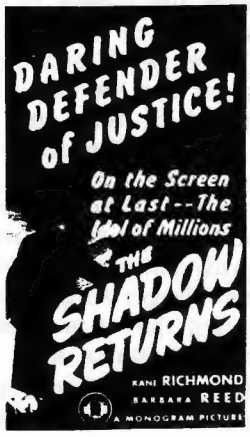
Rinehart and Hopwood simply extended Stoker's **DRACULA**. Logically, the Count would have to be a member of the underworld, one who lived by night. He could not acquire the blood he required for survival in any legal manner, so he had to kill people in order to get it. So the Count became the Prince of Darkness, a shadowy night figure, a projection of the dark side of nature.

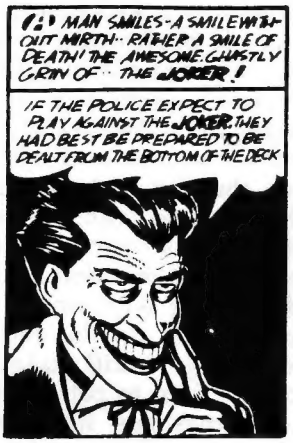
As for the detection, Rinehart gives credit to her literary influences, Arthur Conan Doyle and Alexandre Dumas, but from her reference to William Gillette, it is likely she was influenced more by *his* performance on Broadway as Sherlock Holmes than by any re-reading of Conan Doyle's work. Holmes began his career in 1887 in **A STUDY IN SCARLET** and few mystery writers have not been influenced by the tight prose and clear logic of Doyle. Cornelia's logical deductions are pure Holmes.

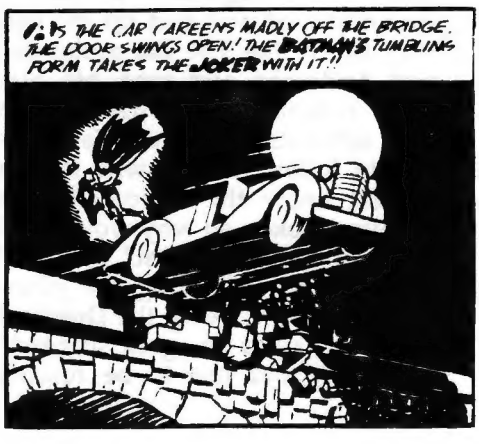
Walter B. Gibson.

What Bill Finger did was to take the masked nocturnal avenger and the detective and fuse them into a single character. Instead of being a manifestation of evil, the Batman would fight against evil, but, in truth, Finger swiped a lot of things from Rinehart, and Gibson without giving them any credit. Rinehart used the calling card and the bat signal, to give you a couple of examples. "Look at the way he leaves his calling card after every job--a black paper bat--a bat drawn on the wall with a burnt match (11)." Here is the way she described the bat signal: "...suddenly, travelling swiftly from right to left across the shades of the French windows, there appeared a glowing circle of brilliant white light. Inside the circle was a black, distorted shadow--a shadow like the shadow of a gigantic black bat! It was there--then a second later, it was gone!"

Let's have a little fun and look at one of the early Batman stories logically. We'll use the debut of The Joker. As it begins, The Joker is announcing over the radio that certain rich men will die at midnight and The Joker will steal one of their valuable treasures. If you whiz through the story without giving it much thought, it's all right, but the slightest reflection on the story and art tears it to shreds. We see an elderly couple listening as The Joker states his plan. How did The Joker get access to that radio transmission? Where did he learn about electronics? The listener assumes the message is a joke since Orson Welles had recently pulled the same kind of gag on the public when he dramatized an Invasion from Mars on the Mercury Theater in 1938. Next panel, we find that radio stations have been swamped with calls. Why? The population isn't threatened. What would the average radio listener care about some rich man's jewelry? Nothing. The millionaire calls the police. Twelve officers surround him at midnight, but he dies anyway. In reality, some tired desk sergeant would have taken the call, logged it in his book, and dismissed it as just another of hundreds of crank calls the New York police get every day. We know that Batman's Gotham is actually New York, because Finger told Steranko. The dead plutocrat has The Joker's grin on his face. Cute, but very unlikely. If there is a poison that acts in that manner, it is only known to Bill Finger. The diamond found in the safe is glass, indicating that The Joker has already been there and switched the gems. How did he get access to the house? How did he get the combination to the safe? What kind of chemical







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could be injected in someone that would kill him in exactly 24 hours? How did The Joker get near the criminal to inject him? How did he time it so he would inject him exactly 24 hours earlier? Finger has the newspapers and radio stations screaming about The Joker. After one crime? In New York in the thirties when gangster killings were an everyday event? The routine is repeated a second time, same circle of cops, same result. I guess Finger thought the cops had nothing to do but assign half a shift to sit around some millionaire's living room all evening. Where the millionaire's own private bodyguards are is a good question.

The second millionaire dies and gas fills the room. The Joker has been hiding in a suit of armor. He killed the millionaire with a blown dart, then gassed the cops with a gas gun swiped from the Green Hornet radio show. But what is this gas and how did The Joker get it and how did he manage to get into the man's house and dress himself in that suit of armor without anyone knowing about it? Where were the rich man's servants? In the thirties, he would have had a couple of dozen, including maids, butlers, gardeners, a chauffeur--where is everyone? Finger forgot about them. He also forgot that it is impossible for anyone to put on a suit of armor without help. The Medieval knights who wore such armor always had help from their pages. The noise of that armor would have awakened everyone in the house. So here is The Joker with a gas gun in his hand, the room full of knocked-out cops, and he's not wearing a gas mask! Where did he get those immune lungs? What is this "venom spray"? It's not hard to figure out that Finger sat and listened to the radio as he put together his story and he just copied down what he heard the way today's comic book writers copy down what they see on the tube in front of them. Why bother to think?

After the first murder, Dick Grayson [Robin] suggests they go after The Joker, but Batman says the time isn't ripe? Why not? Why does he wait until someone else is killed? Brute Nelson, a stereotyped B-movie gangster decides to get The Joker, because the laughing man is cutting in on his action. Batman hears about this over the Grapevine and heads for Brute's house. Talk about coincidences. The Joker shows up at Brute's at the same time as Batman. He comes in a downstairs window as the Caped Crusader appears at the top of the stairs. How did he get up there? Did he fly in an upstairs window? Was he using the Batgiro swiped from The Shadow? Batman jumps headlong down the stairs into three crooks. Strangely enough, his momentum doesn't carry all of them across the room into a pile against a far wall. What follows is a series of panels unrelated to any credible choreography. Bob Kane never thought his art out at all. Here is The Joker with his left leg out the window and he's casually shooting Brute with a gun held in his left hand. The Joker isn't holding on to anything! Just why Brute didn't shoot the clumsy Joker is a mystery, since he has his gun in his hand. Batman chases The Joker and jumps on the back of his moving car. In a second panel he is standing on what would have been the running board [cars still had these carriage leftovers in the thirties] if Kane had remembered to draw it. As it is, he is standing on nothing. The Joker, driving a speeding car now, tries to shoot Batman with the gun in his right hand. Batman holds on to the door with his left hand and grabs The Joker's wrist with his right. The car crashes through a solid stone railing and goes off a bridge as the two characters leap out on the passenger side. Amazing. How did they get over there when they were fighting on the other side of the car seconds before? How did that car get through that stone railing? How could it have been driven straight into the side of the bridge? Batman and The Joker do not hit the pavement and wind up in intensive care with concussions. This is the comic book world here. In the next panel, Joker is punching Batman with a left hook. Next he kicks him off the bridge into the water, so Batman, human like you and me, drowns and that's the end of him, huh? Not a bit of it. The cold water revives "the dark knight" and a couple of panels later he is back in his mansion smoking his pipe and chatting with Robin. The Joker is already back on the radio, this time threatening to kill Judge Drake who once sent him to prison. This time The Joker comes and hangs out with the judge in the disguise of a Police Chief. He ambushed and tied up the real one very much like The Bat ambushed the real Anderson and took his place in Mary Rinehart's **THE BAT**. Robin has been left outside the judge's house and told to follow anyone who left, but he doesn't know the Police Chief is the disguised Joker, so why would he leave his post to follow him? He wouldn't. But he does, following the Joker to a deserted house. Being the Dumbo he is, he walks right in, gets slugged over the head, and has to be rescued by Batman who is following in his footsteps. The wise one has coated Robin's shoes with a luminous material that shows up under an infra-red flashlight Batman carries with him. The Joker has casually changed clothes between panels and is about to inject Robin when Batman crashes through the window. Without slashing his face to ribbons on the glass, Batman grabs the hand with the shringe and slugs The Joker. Joker falls against a table filled with chemicals and an "electrical flame" starts a fire. Finger says there is a blast. Joker grabs for his gas gun and lets Batman have it. He claims to have injected himself with an antidote and is immune to the gas. The Joker leaves. Well, gimme a break here, guys. The blast in such close quarters would have killed everyone and the flames would have burned them all to putrescent slime in a few minutes, leaving nothing but charred meat in that old house, but Batman just slings old Robin over his shoulder and strolls outside. The problem here is that Finger and Kane were really doing Superman, not Batman. They *said* he was a human, vulnerable like everyone else, then they proceeded to write and draw him doing humanly impossible things.

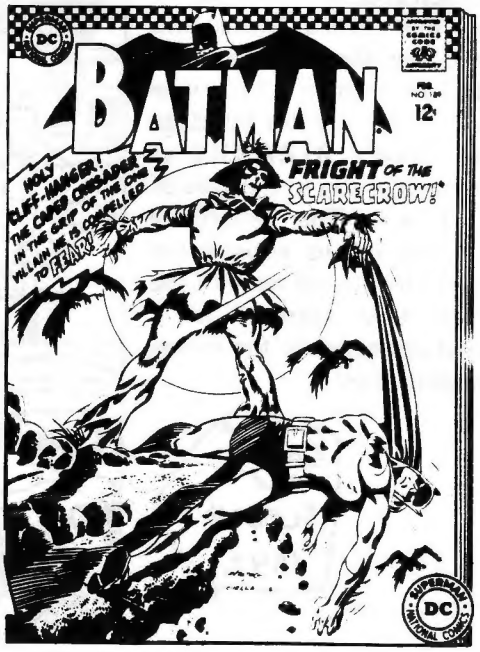
No one thinks to call the fire department. No thought that innocent people might be in the area, that the burning house might be a danger. Batman and Robin just race off after The Joker who is into his next crime. They were all on foot, but next panel we find The Joker outside a penthouse at the top of a building. The dynamic duo jump over from the girders of a building next door, just in time to encounter The Joker. Boy, these guys have durability. Where did the Joker get *his* superpowers. One would think he would be in a hospital ward on chemo-therapy, rather than out killing millionaires and collecting jewelry.

Joker fires his pistol at Batman, but surprise, Batman is wearing a bulletproof vest! Bullet proofed vests are extremely heavy and the wearer has little agility, but we won't worry our hero about that. The Joker jumps to the uncompleted building next door in his attempt to escape, but Robin is waiting. The Boy Wonder falls on his back and kicks The Joker in the jaw. The Joker falls over the side, but Batman catches him with one arm (Hey, this is Finger's writing.), drags him up into the penthouse patio, bats him with a left hook and next panel's newspaper headline proclaims **BATMAN CAPTURES JOKER**. At the end, Joker is behind bars planning his

escape. We still have no name for him, no background. All we know is that he was in prison. Finger knew nothing of actual police work. Batman is action for its own sake.

As Batman continued, the artwork improved, though panel logic remained as absurd as detailed here. The villains, imitated from those of Chester Gould's **DICK TRACY**, were always gimmick and image-oriented. The result was the same whether Dick chased Mumbles or Batman chased Two-Face Dent. The Joker's origin was told in **THE MAN BEHIND THE HOOD** in 1952. He was a worker in a chemical laboratory and he tired of his daily work so he decided to steal a million dollars in one grand robbery and retire. He escaped with the money by swimming through a pool contaminated with chemical waste and when he got home he found his hair had turned green and his skin chalk white and his lips bright red. Of course, he wasn't the least bit sick from his experience and didn't even consult a doctor. The Joker was inspired by a movie version of Victor Hugo's **THE MAN WHO LAUGHS** (1928), which starred Conrad Veidt.

You're not supposed to think about a comic book story. It's that simple. It's all action and it goes by in seconds. If you look closely at the panels and consider the art in relation to what is said and think about the realistic possibilities of what you are being asked to believe, you'll have a rough time accepting comic book writing at all. Batman and Robin and their peers would be long dead in a real world and before that they would have been complete physical wrecks, toothless masses of broken bones and scar tissue. Cartoonists can't have it both ways. Batman is either human or not and if he is, he has to be treated accordingly, not put in situations where he walks through a gas fire unburned or catches a falling body with one hand. **BATMAN** degenerated in the fifties. What could be more stupid than putting a bat mask on a dog and calling him Bat Hound? Well, in case you think the idea died, you probably missed those two episodes of **THE BIONIC WOMAN** where Jamie Summers was assisted by her Bionic German Shepherd. The worse an idea is, the more likely you are to see it repeated on television several times in your lifetime.



Was there any significant change when the Joker story I have analyzed was combined by Alan Moore and artist Brian Bolland with the 1952 **RED HOOD** tale to become **THE KILLING JOKE** (1988)? We are now post spaghetti western, hence graphic violence is de rigeur, because the writers and artists have forgotten that tragic events were intensified in Greek tragedy *because* they took place offstage. Today's artist would have his camera-eye in close-up as Oedipus tore out his eyes. This, coupled with rear nudity and an occasional breast, is considered adult fare, but what is adult about rubbing the reader's nose in a violent event like the shooting of Police Commisioner Gordon's daughter, Barbara? Where Bolland's art is as professional and precise as Kane's early drawing was amateurish and careless, the story remains a basic revenge tragedy. Batman's mystique is preserved and he is as absurd a figure in 1988 as he was in 1939. Though he still cannot fly, Bolland has him flying down out of the sky just as Kane did, a Superman in bat cape and cowl. When the Joker shoots Barbara Gordon as part of his revenge against her father, *she suffers for several panels, yet Batman hits Joker in the jaw and he doesn't even bleed.* Moore's technique is to amplify the old formula, to make the villain quintessentially evil so the reader will be satisfied when he gets it in the end, but at the same time Moore grafts a psychological plot into this bondage story showing the Joker's home life and the original reason for his shift to a life of crime.

Moore is out to rationalize evil via psychoanalysis as he did in his **WATCHMEN** series. His Joker is still the chemical lab worker who escapes via the card factory, but he is also a man trying to make it as a stand-up comic, a composite of of Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce. Joker was forced to commit his crime by others. He would have been a nice guy, but bad people pushed him into crime. His ultimate madness results from his reflection upon the state of the world. The Moore thesis is that *madness is the only plausible response in an irrational psychotic world.* Moore sends Batman to the Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane to talk things over with The Joker. Problem is, the Joker has already escaped, using a doppelganger in white-face to cover for him. Batman's subsequent search for him is paralleled by flashbacks to the villain's early life, interspersed with his

present revenge scheme which includes shooting Barbara Gordon, kidnapping the Commissioner, and torturing the man by riding him through a tunnel of hate as he projects giant blow-ups of a nude Barbara in pain. Just where The Joker found his freaks, his bald pygmies in panties and stockings, his fat woman, is anyone's guess. These Barnum characters would be long dead, and were they living they would be unlikely to deal with a psycho like The Joker. What interest would they have in torturing Gordon? But we are not supposed to ask rational questions of this story any more than we were of the earlier one by Finger and Kane. Moore and Bolland simply do the Joker against the background of Westworld and the abandoned amusement park used in the recent film of **SUPERGIRL**. It's a Coney Island of the mind with The Joker doing his Lenny Bruce routine on giant television screens. On the one hand, Moore is trying to make credible, via psychology and sociology a couple of cardboard comic characters from the pulp era, but his effort is negated by the absurdity of the situation. The Joker is using madness as a personal weapon against a world that has drifted into psychosis, and Batman is just old Gary Cooper from **HIGH NOON**. *Let's talk things over, Joker, and try to avoid the bloodshed.* We know from the beginning that this is a comic book fantasy a la 1988 and violence is the only acceptable answer to any conflict. That any comic fan would accept Batman and The Joker shaking hands and walking off into the sunset is the real killing joke.

By 1988, the woman is just as much a victim as she was in the late thirties when she was shown in jeopardy on every issue of every Jungle and mystery pulp run off by Street and Smith, but there is a significant difference between then and now. In 1938, we would have seen the raised knife, the threat; in 1988, we see the slashing, the bloodshed, the kind of torture which was reserved for the under-the-counter bondage magazines. Irving Klaw's **BIZARRE** or **EXOTIQUE** pale in comparison to the gore of **THE KILLING JOKE**. The fetishistic sado-masochism designed to satisfy the economic and sexually frustrated male of the depression thirties now appears in a magazine considered appropriate for young children. How the time flies!

WOMEN IN BATMAN 1970's

SALLY THE SLEUTH 1942

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How do you deal with women in a mic book? In 1956, Batwoman ppeared. She wore a skintight ostume not unlike that worn by MISS URY in Tarpe Mills' newspaper strip, nd her story was a carbon copy of HANTOM LADY. Batwoman was athy Kane, a bored socialite who urned to nocturnal crime fighting for ecreation. An ex-Circus star like Robin, he decided to compete with Batman, o she got herself a costume and a Bat-Cycle, found an old abandoned ave where she could hide her stuff, a ve very much like the one where HE BLACK WHIP hid her horse in he forties serial. Batwoman got the best of Batman a number of times and his response was not to welcome her as an equal, a fellow crime stopper, no, his response was typically male chauvinist protectivist. He set out to find out her real identity and when he was able to do this he told her it was too dangerous for her to continue her career. If *he* could find out who she was, others could, too. So what? The same was true for the old Bat sexist. Her giving in and quitting lacked credibility. She was revived, of course, but the comic book world was still a male enclave and Batwoman was cheesecake, good for a novelty adventure here or there, but never taken seriously or developed as a possible title. By 1960, DC even married Batman to Batwoman in an imaginary story written by Wayne's butler, Alfred. In 1961, the whole schtick was repeated with Batgirl, who was Kathy Kane's niece, Betty. These women characters were and continue to be ornamental, dressed in impractical skin tight costumes to give the stories in which they appear an erotic flavor designed to appeal to the teenaged male reader. Batman drifted into Science-fiction and imaginary adventures in the fifties for the same reason Superman did. The character was exhausted and the company was willing to do whatever was necessary to keep him going because the money was really coming in from licensed products. That's why we got stories like **BAT-MITE MEETS MR. MXYZTPLK**, Bat-Mite being a little character from the Fourth Dimension a la Mr. Mxyztplk, a magical adversary of Superman.

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When Frank Miller worked on Batman, reviving the image of the Dark Knight, he went back to Rinehart's conception, whether he realized it or not. She said of the Bat: "He may be honored in his community by day...and at night, a bloodthirsty assassin (12)." Finger's motivation for Batman came from Chester Gould's Dick Tracy. In the first Batman story published in **Detective Comics 27** in May of 1939, young Bruce Wayne witnesses the murder of his parents by a robber and he vows to spend his life getting revenge against criminals. Dick Tracy saw the murder of Mr. Truehart and spent his life in law enforcement as a result.

One thing the reader should consider at this point is that the people working in comics have taken plagiarism for granted since the beginning. Many of the comic pioneers were artists first and writers second. They were not educated people, indeed, their reaction was usually to make fun of the educated, casting them as mad scientists and absurd villains. Hence when we are dealing with the first wave of comic books in the thirties we are talking about material most of which was swiped from pulp magazines, novels, and movies. As soon as enough comic books were on the stands, they became a source for constant plagiarism. Jules Feiffer included an entire chapter in **THE GREAT SUPER HEROES** (1965) just talking about the subject. The younger artists would show one another their swipes and their swipe files and later when they had become successful in the business, they would deny that they swiped, no matter how many second-hand Alex Raymond and Hal Foster panels one might point out in their stories. Art is different from writing. When an artist draws his conception of something, be it a tree or Batman, he feels the art belongs to him, that it *is* him. Some people can sit at their traceboards and argue that the panel they just traced from Steranko or Kirby is *their* work. When William Wallace Denslow illustrated the characters in **THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ**, he was drawing characters that had been created by Lyman Frank Baum, but after drawing the characters he felt they belonged to him and that he could do anything he wanted with them. He and Baum shared the copyright, but when Denslow did his strip on the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman in 1904, he gave no credit to Baum. After all, it was *his* art, not Baum's. When Baum worked on the musical adaptation in 1902, he didn't see why Denslow should share in the profits since he was doing very little work on the production. Writer and artist went their separate ways, and all of the other Baum Oz books were illustrated by John Rea Neill, who was hired by the publisher and had no share in the copyright.

The comic book Batman was second banana to Superman who had become a success in **ACTION COMICS 1** (June, 1938), and he always would be. He was a human being. A rich guy with fancy underwear and a lot of gimmicks. That fight in **THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS** (1986) where Batman and Superman spend a lot of time punching each other was totally ridiculous. Superman is an extra-terrestial, an invulnerable being who can't be hurt. One of his punches would have turned Batman's jawbone to powder. Using the video techniques a la Howard Chaykin's **AMERICAN FLAGG**, Miller has a shrink on Merv psychoanalyze Batman: "Batman's psychotic sublimative psycho-erotic behavior pattern is like a net. Weak-egoed neurotics like Harvey (Two-Face) are drawn into corresponding intersticing patterns. You might say Batman commits the crimes..using his so-called villains as narcissistic proxies (39)." You might also say the writers and artists commit the crimes in comic books using the characters as proxies. Miller casts

Batman as a ruthless vigilante in modern New York where justice has evolved in favor of the criminals. In one scene he throws a crippled criminal out a window onto a fire escape and watches as the man bleeds. Miller's Bruce Wayne is a lonely aging man, still angry and vengeful. He has a girl train to be the new Robin. Miller's Batman is deadly serious stuff. None of the old Jerry Robinson/Mort Weisinger humor is left. No sixties camp. No escapist fantasy here. In the forties, Batman helped us get away from reality. Miller rubs our noses in all of the aberrations of contemporary city life. His influences and swipes are apparent. Panel layouts inspired by Neal Adams. Sound over panels a la Harvey Kurtzman's **BLAZING COMBAT**. Mindless mutant gangs which are complete stereotypes, collective horror without individuation. A cloaking device from Star Trek. A shoot out with Jerry Robinson's Joker in a hall of mirrors from Ian Fleming's **THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN**. Miller's **DARK KNIGHT** moves from the dramatically powerful and emotionally credible to the ridiculous. His conception of Batman is ultimately that of a supernatural being, not the human being originally conceived by Finger and Kane. His **DARK KNIGHT** reads like an imaginary novel from the fifties cast in the atmosphere of the eighties as seen by the makers of films like **DEATH WISH** and **ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK** and **ROAD WARRIOR.**

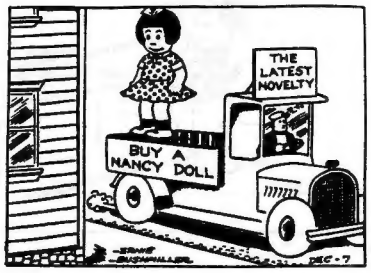
In the 1987 graphic novel, **BATMAN, SON OF THE DEMON,** Mike Barr grafts a Batman plot on an Ian Fleming story. He has Batman in love with Talia, even married to her. Talia has a child by Batman, but lies to him and says she has lost the baby. Later she gives it to an orphanage. A normal life and fatherhood are to be denied Bruce Wayne. Can't be out there fighting terrorists and mad scientists out to rule the world if you have to spend the evenings at home reading fairy tales to the kids. Jerry Bingham drew the story in which Talia's father, Al Ghul, is opposed by Qayin. Though Batman is given human feelings, he is still projected as the supernatural being from **THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS**. I think these writers and artists who work with Barman have a hard time making up their minds about the character. *Either he is a vulnerable human being or he isn't.* They continually show Batman doing things a human being could not do. He could not fly around on top of buildings, nor could he win battles against superhuman extra-terrestrials like Superman, nor could he magically know where crimes were taking place and always show up just on time. A bullet in the shoulder is a bullet in the shoulder and the victim is not going to go out and swing on a rope a few hours later. Clearly, the people working with Batman want him to be an absurdity, someone who is never consistant, a *deux ex machina*. So be it, but this eliminates the possibility of discussing the character rationally. He becomes anything a particular writer or artist wants him to be. He has no past, no continuity, and very little credibility. He has to go on being an avenger, because the kid reader would not be interested in the real life of a man like Bruce Wayne. He wants to see a fantasy creature flying around in the night. He wants those over-developed muscles which in reality inhibit action rather than promote it. Fine. *But don't keep trying to tell us we're dealing with a human being, someone who can suffer just like other men.*

Ted White commented in **ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME** (1970) that Batman was not Bob Kane's idea, but Steranko says he was, that Kane got the nod from DC and called Finger and they collaborated to work out the details of the character. Since Kane drew the strip, he was the one who signed it and Finger was never given a by-line. Finger was born in 1914 and died in 1974. Kane was born in 1916. He is still living. A few years ago he was showing his Batman paintings at The San Diego Comic Convention. ~~John Benson~~ who wrote the entry on Batman for the Maurice Horn **WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE COMICS**, said that Finger was considered "the definitive writer of Batman (250)." Ron Goulart in his **GREAT HISTORY OF COMIC BOOKS** reiterated Steranko's interview with Bill Finger. Feiffer said of Batman: "His lineage--the school of rich idlers who put on masks--dates back to The Scarlet Pimpernel and includes Zorro and the Green Hornet (26). Comparing Batman to Superman, he wrote: "*The Batman school preferred a vulnerable hero to an invulnerable one,* preferred a hero who was able to take punishment and triumph in the end to a hero who took comparatively little punishment, just dished it out (27)." In **SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT** (1953), Fredric Wertham accused Batman and Robin of being a homosexual couple. DC editor E. Nelson Bridwell, introducing the collection of Batman comic stories in **BATMAN FROM THE 30s TO THE 70s,** defended the dynamic duo. Just buddies in the bat cave. Bridwell confirmed that the chief writer on Batman was Finger. "One sure sign of a Finger script was the presence of gigantic working models of everyday objects. They might be outdoor signs or indoor displays, but they were exact replicas of their smaller originals. His giant sewing machines really sewed; his giant phonographs played; and his giant paint tubes were chock full of real paint, ready to squirt in The Joker's face (13)."

The idea of teenaged sidekicks never worked for me. Robin was put into the Batman strip to give Batman someone to talk to. He was the orphaned son of a couple of circus trapeze artists who were killed in a fall. Bruce Wayne took him on as his ward, adopted him, trained him, got him a costume, and we had Robin. Named after Robin Hood. The idea was that kids would identify with Robin, but that wasn't true for me or any of the kids I knew. Hey, we *were* kids. We wanted to be adults. We wanted to be Superman and Batman. Who wanted to be Robin? I can see the dramatic necessity for Wayne to have someone to talk to so he wouldn't have to think all the time, but let's leave it at that. I'm sure today's readers who identify with those stiffly animated superheroes that disgrace kidvid time still reject kid characters. On the other hand, they seem to identify with Ninja Turtles and Gobots and Transformers and other inhuman creatures so what do I know?

So what we have in Batman is a woman's fantasy, developed in comic strip form by uneducated men, expanded and ultimately turned over to educated writers and artists who dressed the character up with psychoanalytic jargon but could not deal with the contradictions that arose in the process. What Batman is now is just another invulnerable superhero in a silly costume. That the recent stories about him have been called adult is a joke. Are violence, brutality, and sado-masochism adult? Not really. The only way for Batman to become adult would be for him to give up his entire fantasy of crime-fighting and accept his wasted life for what it is, childless and lonely. He'd commit suicide if the company would let him.

Joe Brancatelli.



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ERNIE BUSHMILLER AND NANCY

Brian Walker's **THE BEST OF ERNIE BUSHMILLER'S NANCY** has come out in time for the old Christmas market. This is a high quality paperback, designed for the fan and the cartoonist. If you were ever into Nancy's strange trip, you'll enjoy seeing this collection.

Ernest Paul Bushmiller was born in the South Bronx near 137th Street on August 23, 1905, the middle child, sandwiched between on older and a younger sister. His father, Ernie Senior, was a German immigrant, an artist who used to give chalk talks on the vaudeville circuit. His mother, Elizabeth Hall, was Irish. Ernie quit school after the eighth grade and went to work as a copy boy for the New York Evening **WORLD**. He was 14. It was 1919, just after the first World War. At night, Ernie studied at the National Academy of Design, keeping his studies secret until he was ready to show the guys in the art room what he could do. Someone thought he had talent or he wouldn't have been assigned to sweep up in the art room, the first step on the ladder to becoming a cartoonist in the 1920s. Coulton Waugh wrote in 1947, "The theory which seems to have worked out very well, was that by being around the other artists and seeing their work, your own work would gradually acquire polish and finish (**THE COMICS**, p. 137)." Waugh saw Bushmiller as "a very talented cartoonist with a dry, economical style, an uncluttered art sense refreshing to see; there are no scratchy pen thistles to hurt your eyes in his work (137)." Ernie's breakthrough came when he was assigned to illustrate a Sunday feature on Houdini's tricks called *Red Magic*. Though Ernie ghosted *Fritzi Ritz* as early as 1925, the strip carried the name of it's creator Larry Whitington until late 1929.

Fritzi Ritz was one of many imitations of the character referred to by Coulton Waugh, earliest historian of the comic strips, as a French Doll. French women gained a certain mystique in America due to the experiences young American soldiers had with them during the first World War (1914-17). To understand the character, compare it to previous depictions of women in the comic strips, say to the mother of the Katzenjammer Kids. It was Cliff Sterrett who established the character in *Polly and Her Pals*. Russ Westover carried her on into the second world war in *Tillie The Toiler*. Chic Young did her as *Dumb Dora* who was later restyled into Blondie Boopadoup, the flapper who married rich Dagwood Bumstead and caused his fall into the middle class. Bushmiller quickly lost interest in Fritzi and brought her niece Nancy into the strip as a device for his gags. It was not long before Nancy was the focus of the strip and Fritzi was consigned to the role of an adult reactor. Waugh described Nancy as "an engaging chunk of little girl, with contented eyes and a very personal and neat black sponge of hair with a minute, white hair ribbon snugged on top (138)." Jerry Robinson called her "an obstreperous little girl with black prickly hair (*THE COMICS*, 1974, p. 168.)." Martin Sheridan, who interviewed Bushmiller for his 1942 collection, *CLASSIC COMICS AND THEIR CREATORS*, said it was Milt Gross who advised Ernie to drop Fritzi and Make Nancy his major, but Sheridan quotes both 1931 and 1938 as the date. It was probably 1938, since Nancy became the strip title in 1940. Gross and Bushmiller were close friends. They had a studio together in the Chrysler Building for awhile after the **World** was sold in 1931. *Fritzi Ritz* might have become a more serious and detailed career girl strip a la *Dixie Dugan* and *Ella Cinders*, but Bushmiller bucked the trend and turned Nancy into a successful kid strip, one which lead the way for John Stanley's *Little Lulu* [originated in the Saturday Evening Post as a panel gag by Marge Henderson in 1932] and Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*. Nancy's "gags are absolutely unsophisticated and unembroidered; they are humor on an almost primitive, childlike level," commented Sheridan. Certainly Nancy was too unsophisticated for an aesthete like Bill Blackbeard who excluded any mention of her or Bushmiller from his *Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* and contributed two rather negative pieces re artist and strip to the Maurice Horn *Encyclopedia of the Comics*.

Lest you think Nancy was inspired by a little Bushmiller, it must be noted that Ernie and Abby never had any children of their own. Whence Nancy? Well, I suspect she was inspired by Darla Hood of the Little Rascals, just as I suspect a memory of Jackie Coogan as *The Kid* resulted in the creation of Sluggo. Sheridan noted that Ernie used to play hookey from the office and spend his afternoons going from picture show to picture show. The major film star of the mid-thirties was Shirley Temple, a fact that had a lot to do with the success of the little girl strips, but Nancy's early brillo pad hairdo is closer to Darla than to Shirley. Ernie was an ardent movie fan and when his strip featured Fritzi in Hollywood, it caught the attention of Harold Lloyd, resulting in Ernie's time in Hollywood as a gag writer. The various comic historians don't seem to understand just why Ernie left Hollywood and returned to New York, but knowing how writers are treated by the movie industry I understand it. A writer in Hollywood is one cut above the janitor or the guy who parks your car. No status at all. Back in New York, Ernie was on his way to fame as a cartoonist and he had the support of his fellow artists.

Ernie supposedly wrote gags for Lloyd in 1930 for *MOVIE CRAZY*. Perhaps some were used, perhaps not.

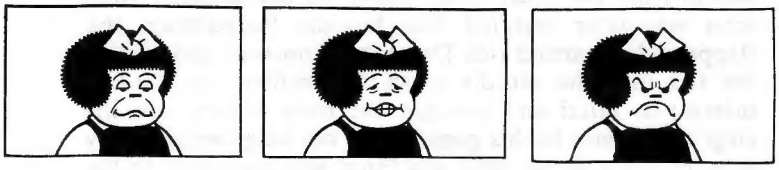
MOVIE CRAZY wasn't shot until May of 1932. It was released in September of that year. Bushmiller was given no credit, but he wouldn't have been. Lloyd's regular writer/director, Clyde Bruckner got credit. Story credits went to Agnes Christine Johnson, John Grey, and Felix Adler. The scene in the film that might well have come from Bushmiller is the one in which Lloyd accidently put on a magician's coat and went onto the dance floor. Naturally, all sorts of things began to happen. A rabbit appeared on a diner's plate, etc. Ernie might have come up with this gag in memory of his early work for Houdini on *Red Magic*. On the other hand it is possible that Lloyd simply put Bushmiller on the payroll for awhile, found he didn't work out, and that was the end of it. Brian Walker says Ernie got $250 a week for gags on *MOVIE CRAZY* and that Bushmiller returned to the Bronx in 1932, but he doesn't give his source. I assume he interviewed Bushmiller, but he doesn't say when or where. Neither Richard Schickel [*THE SHAPE OF LAUGHTER*, 1974] nor Tom Dardis [*HAROLD LLOYD: THE MAN ON THE CLOCK*] refer to any participation by Bushmiller in the writing of *MOVIE CRAZY*.

Blackbeard might not have liked Nancy, but the readers did. In a 1962 survey by Edward J. Robinson and David Manning White, Nancy placed 9th out of 128 strips ("Who Readers the Funnies--and Why?" reprinted in *THE FUNNIES*, London: Macmillan, 1963, pp. 179-89.). In *COMICS: ANATOMY OF A MASS MEDIUM*, Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs saw Nancy only as a strip for girls and ignored Fritzi Ritz entirely (36). George Perry and Alan Aldridge ignored Nancy in *THE PENGUIN BOOK OF THE COMICS* (1967), yet showed Carl Anderson's *Henry* and Schulz' *Peanuts*. Schulz owes a big debt to Bushmiller. His first *Peanuts* strips appeared in *Tip Top* in 1949 when that title was running *Nancy and Fritzi Ritz* regularly. Watterson's dream and fantasy sequences in *Calvin and Hobbes* also owe a debt to Nancy's surrealism.

Ernie Bushmiller died of a heart attack at his home in Stamford, Connecticut, on August 15, 1982. He was one of the founders of the National Cartoonists' Society, an organization which grew out of a camp show put on in 1944 by the American Theater Wing. The big seven who entertained the troops included Bushmiller and Otto Soglow, Milton Caniff, Russell Patterson, Rube Goldberg, C.D. Russell, and Gus Edson (Sheridan, 286).

Those who read the Walker book may be surprised at the ingenuity of Bushmiller and the playful attitude he took toward his characters and their world. I've heard the strip called simple, but suggest those who think so try to draw it sometime. To me, it was extremely well planned and executed, and I think Bushmiller was wise not to turn it into a career girl strip. Hey, where is *Tillie The Toiler* these days? *Dixie Dugan*? The only one of those strips that survived was Dale Messick's *Brenda Starr*.

Nancy is still in syndication in various parts of the world, but I hate the way she is being drawn so will leave any discussion of the current strip to those who feel more kindly toward it. C. G.



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MEL BLANC

If you grew up watching Warner Brother's cartoons like I did, you spent a lot of time admiring the versatility or Melvin Jerome Blanc, the man with a thousand voices. Born May 30, 1908, the son of Frederick Blank and Estelle Rosenbaum, Mel started his career as the voice of the drunken bull in PICADOR PORKY in 1937. It was his idea to record all of the characters' voices separately and have the film editor splice it all together; before Mel, they were doing it in sequence, a process which took days. While most of the directors at Warner's have taken credit for Bugs Bunny at one time or another, it was Mel's voice and mannerisms that established the personality of the hare in the public mind. I doubt that anyone would argue that Blanc's contribution to the cartoons is a major one, but it's clear from his autobiography, THAT'S NOT ALL FOLKS (Warner Books, 1988), that he feels neglected. It's not that his work has gone unappreciated; actually, I knew who he was long before I knew anything about the men who animated the cartoons, mainly because he was always given credit for his work on Jack Benny's radio show.

Born in a wood-frame house near Bush and Divisadero in San Francisco, Mel started doing voices when he was a kid. Radio gave him his break and from there he went into the cartoons, becoming the voices of Porky Pig, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Tweety and Sylvester, Yosemite Sam, and literally thousands of other characters.

Blanc did all of the voices in the cartoons, certainly an amazing achievement by any standards. He did work for Disney at one point, doing the drunken cat, Gideon, in PINOCCHIO, but most of his dialogue was taken out in the final cut, because the cat was *too* drunk. One hiccup remained. That was Mel's moment in PINOCCHIO.

His autobiography adds a lot of information to the field of animation and even those who are not that interested in the cartoon business will find Mel's memories of working with Jack Benny and other radio stars fascinating. C. G.

COMIX PLUGOLA

EL VIBORA 103 and 104 $8 ea. from Jose M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3.08003, Barcelona, Spain.* CEREBUS 114 begins the Jaka Story. Aardvark Vanaheim. WEIRDO 23 tells you more about Bob and Aline Crumb at home.* BLAB 3 is a paperback book from Kitchen Sink, edited by Monte Beauchamp. It features comments by various underground cartoonists re Robert Crumb and his influence on their lives.

Horny hussies will get all shook up when they check out the bulge on this dude! Delvis Messley has a hunka hunka burnin love that just won't quit. If your idea of a good time involves a weekend in Vegas and a bottle of Nembutals this is the kingly conqueror you've been waiting for!

Great caricatures by Xno like this punk Elvis.* AIDS NEWS is an educational comic from People of Color Against AIDS Network, 814 NE 40th Street, Seattle, WA. 98105. Copies of the comic are available for a donation of $1-10.* The Pander Brothers, who did those great issues of GRENDEL are now illustrating a GINGER FOX mini-series for Comico. BLOODSCENT by Dean Allen Schreck has been drawn by Gene Colan and reminds me of his great work in the TOMB OF DRACULA series back in the early seventies. JEZEBEL JADE is a new adventure series with illos by Adam Kubert. *Steve Lafler has illustrated Stephen Beaupre's DUCK & COVER 1. $2.73 PP from 293-A Mather St., Oakland, CA 94611. Eternity is re-running some of the old Sally The Sleuth stories from 1941 in SPICY TALES. Sally influenced Harvey Kurtzman's LITTLE ANNIE FANNY. Simple formula. Sally or Annie had to be undressed most of the story and the artists were kept busy devising motives and opportunities.* My favorite animal comic, USAGI YOJIMBO is up to #13 and the stories are still strong. A hand for Stan Sakai.* Bob Sheridan has some new zines out: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE CLEVELAND BAR SCENE is $2.25 pp. THE ANTI-ARTIST 5, DRONES, AND MR. CROSSHATCH are 50¢/stamp each. 10922 Fortune Ave., Cleveland, OH 44111.*

Eric Vincent is working on TWILIGHT MAN for First Comics. * For $3.50 pp you can get a copy of Mary Fleener's HOODOO. 309 Oceanview, Encinitas, CA 92024.* DISTORTED FEATURES 4 is 50¢/Stamp from Mike Morris, POB 4687, Portland, ORE 97208-4687. * FRAGMENTS 1 is 25¢/stamp from Ben Lord, 818 21st St, #D, Santa Monica, CA 90403.* MISC 27 is $2.50 pp from Randy Paske, 656 Birch Ln. Gilbert, MN 55741-9631.* BABYFAT 61 is 50¢/Stamp from CW. Single panel contributions welcome for future issues.* UNDERGROUND SURREALIST 4 is $2.85 pp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Cambridge, MA 02238.* SCREEN DUMPS 4 is $1.25 pp from Jerry Riddle, 4126 San Roberto #2, Anchorage, AK 99508-2862.* Send an SASE to Dolphin Moon, POB 22262, Baltimore, MD 21203 for their latest listing of comic publications.*

I read Harlan Ellison's article re comics in the December PLAYBOY and that same evening I saw him on television selling cars. Both upset me. I've always respected Ellison as a writer and enjoyed his criticism, but when I read that revisionist comics article I wondered what country I lived in. An article on contemporary comics that doesn't even mention Robert Crumb? One about alternative comics that ignores the work of Mike Friedrich? The black and white comics being published today are a direct result of Crumb's 1967 breakthrough with ZAP and Mike Friedrich's transitional work with Star*Reach in the early seventies. It was Crumb who proved that an artist could draw and publish his own comic outside of New York, retain his copyright and his original artwork. Though Crumb subsequently published his work with various companies, he still retained his own copyright and artwork. This is what Mike Friedrich saw when he founded his Star*Reach Productions and it was artistic control and independence which he used to sell his concept to people like Frank Brunner, Craig Russell, Lee Marrs, and others. Why Ellison ignores the underground and what Friedrich called his 'ground-level' comics puzzles me. He knows the true history as well as I do. He has done work for companies like Last-Gasp Comix, so we can only assume that the exclusion of the underground from his article was a deliberate revision of the true history of comics as they evolved during the sixties and seventies.

It's interesting to me that the artists who are best thought of today, those doing the most innovative work in the overground or Eastern comics, would never have been able to write and draw what they are drawing had it not been for the pioneer work done by Crumb, Shelton, Corben, Holmes, and numerous others who proved the possibility of alternative comics. Yet I seldom hear these people give credit where it is due. Anyone who thinks DC would have accepted something like Frank Miller's version of Batman pre-Crumb is a social cretin and needs to review the history of the sixties and seventies. Michael Friedrich, Frank Brunner, Jim Starlin, Steve Engelhart, and other overground writers and artists came to our Berkeley Underground Comix Convention back in 1974 and they saw the control ug artists had taken over their work. It was the continued success of underground companies that stimulated the formation of companies like Pacific, First, Comico, and the dozens of others now on the scene. Had the artists accepted some social and political censorship, the underground comix would have gained wider distribution, but most ug artists refused to restrain themselves and opted for a more limited readership. By doing so, they opened the door for companies that would produce watered down versions of underground comix, books that could be sold in the comic stores throughout the country. Undergrounds were often berated for their sex and violence, but what was lost in those discussions was their political outlook. It was the anti-establishment attitude that was suppressed by the protectors of suburban America. If you doubt this, why is THE KILLING JOKE on sale in the shopping malls? Sadistic sex and violence is the essence of that story, and the message is lost in the shuffle. The covert fetishism of the thirties and forties is overt in the straight comics of the late eighties. DC saw this as the essence of the undergrounds and assimilated it sans the politics which were the real guts of those early seventies books.

Since it takes millions of dollars of advertising to keep anything in the public eye in this country, you should expect to see a lot more revisionist history in the coming years. It is not in the interest of the establishment to let you know anything about the underground that evolved in the seventies. Books about what happened are few and far between, and their viewpoint is well controlled as anyone who has read Tom Hayden's 'biography' well knows.

But Harlan Ellison pandering to PLAYBOY and selling cars on tv. Oy vey. Can it be he has forgotten his articles in the old Los Angeles FREE PRESS? Has the enfant terrible of science fiction, the master of insult and invective, finally sold his soul?

CY 11/88

I loved the extra-long Batman newsletter. It wasn't your typical 'fannish' article, that's for sure, but a kind of critical look that sort of character isn't used to getting. I judge things by different standards, like tv versus movies, or comic books versus novels, or even (God forbid) real life. I don't read Batman anymore since they have tried to make him fit into the 'real world (or what passes for it)'. Since I'm a non-superhero person I don't get into any of that long underwear stuff, but I have fond memories of the old Bob Kane, Dick Sprang, Bill Finger Batman. It was silly stuff, done in a cartoony style, full of crazy plots and deus ex machina, but it had its own kind of bizarre logic and worked within that framework, and that's what I find missing in today's Batman. It's been worked over by too many artists and writers and no longer has that internal consistency that helped to suspend disbelief.

I used to like the giant props and the bits of business like the villains leaving clues with such obscure meanings that only Batman and Robin could figure them out. Even though the villains always failed they kept coming back. It was a weird family relationship, like trying to get Daddy's attention, or like continuing unsuccessful attempts to join an exclusive club or something. I never thought the character Superman ever achieved the same 'flair' that the 40s and 50s Batman had. Superman's non-appeal to me was the same reason Batman appealed to me . . . I could grow up to be Batman, but never Superman (not unless something magic happened to me).

The fans that worry about their character being ruined by a movie starring Michael Keaton don't seem to realize that there really is no way to play Batman straight. The Costume is too silly. In the old cartoony world of Bob Kane's Batman it didn't seem incongruous, but in the 'real life' world it would be a joke. A guy could not maneuver athletically in it, and a big guy with a long cape standing on a rooftop would be too good a target; that cape sure wouldn't stop a bullet. Also, anyone wearing the costume would be laughed off the street!

KURTZMAN REVISITED

Your ideas are the strength of your work. There are lots of people who can scribble a picture, but it is your insight into people that will set you apart.

Harvey Kurtzman

I first heard about Harvey Kurtzman from Roger Brand at his house in Point Richmond, California. Roger had inked for Wally Wood for a short time before becoming involved with his Strawbrick Character in THE EAST VILLAGE OTHER. I had gone to Brand's place to interview him for one of the series of underground comix reports I was doing for the LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS. Roger was the ultimate comics historian and he had a library of books that would have put any local library to shame. He showed me the seminal works by people like Becker and Feiffer, but the man he talked about most was Harvey Kurtzman. My own interest in comics was marginal at that time. I had collected comic books as a kid, lost them during the war, collected again in the late forties, and lost interest when I started dating girls. I was in the Navy during the mid-fifties and I had paid no attention to EC comix or MAD so Kurtzman's name meant nothing to me.

Roger talked about him as though he were a God just as he talked about Fredric Wertham as though he were the devil. I looked at the books and listened. Roger had copies of TWO-FISTED TALES and FRONTLINE COMBAT, two EC titles which Kurtzman had reshaped into realistic war comics. No GI JOE or SERGEANT FURY here. In Kurtzman's comics, war was bad news and there were few heroes, just poor guys who got caught in the machinery of history. MAD was great stuff. I had seen the magazine on the stands, of course, but had never seen the comic books done by Kurtzman from 1950-56.

At that time, those MAD COMICS were not readily available in comic book form, but there were second-hand paperback editions around, so I made it a point to read some of them and to look for other work done by Kurtzman. It's all listed in Glenn Bray's HARVEY KURTZMAN INDEX, but that reference work was not available then, and it's out of print now.

I kept running into EC fallout as I did the interviews for my FREEP pieces. From Brand I went to Gary Arlington's store in San Francisco's Mission district. An ex-army supply sergeant, Gary had two complete sets of EC comic books which he was using to trade for artwork by various underground artists to be published in his BOGEYMAN or SAN FRANCISCO COMIC BOOK titles. It was Gary who promoted EC to the artists. He was responsible for naming EC revivalist comic books like SKULL and SLOW DEATH FUNNIES though these were published by other companies. Gary had a few ECs hanging on the wall of his store and he let me read them. I remember in 1973 when Bill Gaines was on a book tour touting Frank Jacobs' THE MAD WORLD OF WILLIAM M. GAINES I tried to get Gary and Gaines together for a meeting, but it didn't work out. Bob Beerbohm, the owner of Best of Two Worlds, went along with me to the Clift Hotel the afternoon I interviewed Gaines. I invited Gary, but he wouldn't come. I did introduce Gaines to Ron Turner, the publisher of Last Gasp Comix, and they talked briefly over the phone. What I didn't know at that time was that Gaines had told Gary he couldn't do any more of the mock EC covers he was printing as part of his Nickel Library. Gary had folks like Larry Todd, Jaxon, Jim Osborne, Charlie Dallas, and others doing covers of gory subjects in what he considered the true spirit of EC. Gaines said he was sorry, but it was violation of his copyright and Gary had to cease and desist.

There is a full chapter in the GAINES bio by Frank Jacobs [1972] which discusses Harvey Kurtzman and his work with EC. He is presented as a creative man who had to have things his own way, one who did not have a lot of patience with artists who deviated from his detailed layouts. Kurtzman was as slow as Al Feldstein was fast, but Gaines paid page rates, which meant Feldstein was making a lot more money for turning out horror stories than Kurtzman was on his meticulously researched war books. "Kurtzman played tortoise to Feldstein's hare," as Jacobs put it, "but at EC slow and steady did not win the race."

Clearly, Kurtzman, who preferred to work at home rather than at the office and who hated having anything changed once he had it down on the tissue, was not cut out to be an employee. He had to be his own man and he was not destined to remain under the tight control of big daddy Gaines. They parted company shortly after the beginning of MAD and Kurtzman began his series of beginnings going from TRUMP with Hugh Hefner to HUMBUG with some of his EC artist buddies to HELP! with Jim Warren and ultimately to what was to become America's ultimate comic parody strip, LITTLE ANNIE FANNY which ran in PLAYBOY for over twenty years.

Kurtzman brought honesty to the comics world. Instead of a fantasy world of super soldiers casually machine-gunning hundreds of Asian non-humans, his soldiers were real guys from Michigan or North Dakota out there in real mud in the heat of real battles and they were not destined to wipe out whole enemy platoons single handed and be rewarded with movie contracts. Whether or not realism is apropos in a medium that was heroic fantasy is often debated, but Kurtzman had the strength and the charisma to push

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his concept into the public eye. As Jacobs commented: "Kurtzman's wars were not events to be romanticized (82)."

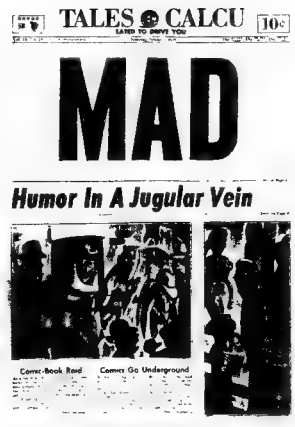
As for MAD, Kurtzman got into something no one else was doing at the time. It is not true that he was the first to parody the comics, because, of course, Al Capp had been parodying Dick Tracy as Fearless Fosdick long before MAD, and newspaper cartoonists often joked with one another by making fun of each other's characters. The Harvard Lampoon and other college humor magazines parodied comic characters, so there were a number of precedents, but Kurtzman broadened the range and scope of parody by assimilating aspects of contemporary life into his deflations of Mickey Mouse and Archie and Superman. Kurtzman always considered MAD his baby, but it was a team effort and certainly Bill Elder, Wally Wood, Jack Davis, and numerous others deserve a lot of credit for making the magazine what it is visually. Gaines said, "Kurtzman started MAD. Feldstein made it a commercial success. Giving Harvey credit for MAD is like giving Robert Fulton credit every time a new ocean liner is launched (38)." Jacobs said "If Kurtzman's name is more of a household word today than Feldstein's, it is partly because Feldstein has made little effort to mingle with his peers in the publishing world. Kurtzman, despite being what he calls a *super private person* is friendly with numerous editors and writers of the literary establishment. Feldstein seldom fraternizes with anyone connected with MAD. He tunes in to his work in the morning and tunes out at night (38-9)."

Gaines considered Kurtzman a traitor when he left EC and raided the art staff, getting Davis and Wood and Elder to work with him on TRUMP. Kurtzman had to sue Gaines to get his royalties on the paperback MAD books and even though he settled out of court, Gaines never thought Harvey should have gotten the money. The main artistic schism between the two men was over the horror comics (1950-54). Kurtzman didn't like them. He thought they were sick and shouldn't be sold to children. Gaines defended them before the Senate. Kurtzman told Gary Groth in 1981: "from a Freudian perspective, they were questionable–the business of playing with dead bodies–stories about chopping up people into baseball fields and making their intestines into a Christmas ribbon. That's not the kind of thing I liked to subject my child to (TCJ 67, Oct, 1981, p. 83)."

In response to this and Kurtzman's long term participation in LITTLE ANNIE FANNY, a woman friend of mine said, "well, how about the horror of young women depilated, given breast implants and plastic surgery, photographed nude, then airbrushed and laid out like corpses in the center of a national magazine? What about that horror story? You could call it MEAT MARKET." Since Kurtzman sees Annie as a vehicle for a broad socio-cultural satire, he might be surprised to know that many young women see her as a monster.

Kurtzman had to leave EC just as a son has to leave his father. He had to form his own organization. His subsequent magazines have became cultic, particularly among the younger generation of cartoonists who tried to revived their spirit via underground comix. BIJOU did a parody of the first MAD in the seventies and in the eighties the image of that book was still being recycled. Jim Williams put it on his mini-comic WAD. It was Kurtzman who suggested the idea of underground comics and Robert Crumb who picked it up. The idea appeared as a parody news item blacklined COMICS GO UNDERGROUND on the cover of MAD 16, this, of course, in relation to the Comics Code being adopted by the comics industry in 1954. Kurtzman stated the underground philosophy well in MY LIFE AS A CARTOONIST (New York: Pocket Books, 1988): "I think a comic story is better when all parts come from one person, some one who has the vision of the whole story and knows what he wants (4)." Nearly all underground comic stories were done this way in contrast to the assembly line system used by Marvel and DC.

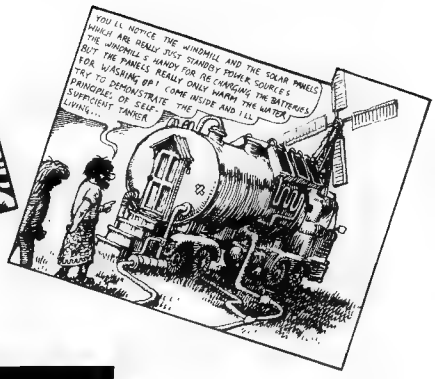
I became acquainted with Harvey Kurtzman when I invited him to Berkeley as the featured guest of my Underground '76 convention. He did the logo for COMIX WORLD 25



which was run on t-shirts for the con by Joel Milke. He was the one person most of the underground artists wanted to see and I knew they didn't have the money to go to New York to see him, so I brought him to Berkeley. In the late seventies and early eighties he has attended many comic conventions around the country, teaching seminars on technique and talking about his career as a cartoonist and humorist.

MY LIFE AS A CARTOONIST is aimed at teenage would-be cartoonists and contains a lot of basic information. I thought it was cute that Kurtzman excluded his work with Hefner at PLAYBOY, since I would have a hard time finding a teenager who didn't know about ANNIE FANNY. Gee, Harv, most kids these days have seen X-rated movies either on their family vcr or on that of a vacationing neighbor. As for the horror, FRIDAY THE 13th is a tv series and the gore in today's horror films makes Jack Davis's old baseball story sound like the original CASEY AT THE BAT. You gotta SEE what's happening on the mall, Harv. Hey, come on up to the lab, and see what's on the slab.

Comics history is still in its infancy. I checked references to Kurtzman for this piece and they are pretty scarce and seldom informed. Though MAD and EC had been around for years, Stephen Becker didn't index Kurtzman in COMIC ART IN AMERICA (1959). George Perry mentions him in relation to ANNIE FANNY in THE PENGUIN BOOK OF THE COMICS (rev. 1971) and gives MAD credit as the origin of the parody comic. In COMICS: ANATOMY OF A MASS MEDIUM (1971), Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs refer to Kurtzman as "the spiritual father of MAD (216)," and "the man who decisively determined the style of humour and satire in the USA after 1950 (218)." Jerry Robinson doesn't mention Kurtzman in his 1974 THE COMICS, nor does the Couperie-Horn HISTORY OF THE COMIC STRIP. Ron Goulart gives only token treatment to MAD in his GREAT HISTORY OF COMIC BOOKS (1986), a book with no references or bibliography. National Lampoon editor Tony Hendra suggests that MAD was a reaction to Fredric Wertham's crusade against the comics. In GOING TOO FAR (1987), he praised Kurtzman as "one of the recurrent influences on Boomer humor (82). . .MAD was his most important achievement. In the harsh climate of the fifties it is now possible to see that there was perhaps room for only one fountainhead of impudent print humor. Had Kurtzman remained at it's head, there is no telling how much better it might have become than it did (82)."



I loved these BIG BANG comic books from England. First time I have seen a cartoonist really get down and parody the whole hippy New Age trip without restraint. Shelton did it a bit in his Freak Brothers strip and I suggest you intellectuals compare his work with BIG BANG.

COMIX PLUGOLA

Hey, a cartoonist has as much right as anyone else to make political statements. This is still a democracy, huh? Then how come the Denver POST and several other papers dropped Cathy Guisewipe's strips which were critical of George Bush? THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN dropped her entirely. I was glad to see her stop talking about her weight and those endless diets and get into something really heavy for a change. George Bush was much more interesting as the invisible man in DOONESBURY than he has been as a sneering presidential candidate staging one of the most dishonest and currupt campaigns in U. S. history. If the 1988 campaign did nothing else, it revealed the total corruption of the majority of our major tv networks and newspapers. All those Republican owned entities dropped all pretense of objectivity and campaigned openly for Bush and his vapid golf-playing buddy-cum-VP. My favorite news clip was the one that showed Mike Dukakis bowling his bowl down the gutter. This was followed up with a shot of Bush as elder statesman touring a munitions factory, the clod versus the great warrior. What a farce! These are leaders?

Which raises the question about what ever happened to underground cartooning? What happened to those guys who used to go on the graphic offensive, to go for the jugular? It's been a while since I've seen anything in the comix that really hit the nail on the head. Where are those guys? Why are there no underground newspapers these days? What is the younger generation doing? Hey, if the current establishment isn't corrupt enough for you, what is? I don't know. Crumb seems to have drifted into suburban life. Maybe everyone's dead. Or out trying to save the whales while the country gets ripped off and sold to foreign powers.

It's a cold December here in Berkeley. I'm on Telegraph Avenue in Cafe Bottega. I'm drinking some tea and watching the passing parade. See lots of young people with expensively shaved heads and hairdos. Leather clothes. These kids must cost their parents a bundle. Hip is more expensive today. It was cheaper in the sixties when I lived in Haight-Ashbury. Relax, I'm not going into a hip nostalgia number. Just remembering. There's a black guy out there in front, babbling to himself. He's got a chartreuse blanket hanging around his neck like a scarf. He gets down and kisses the sidewalk. I've seen the guy around for several years. He never used to talk to himself. He's making progress. Lot of mentals on the street, thanks to Ronald Reagan's

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benevolent presidency. Spaced out people eating out of the corner garbage cans.

There's a fashion plate. Got both sides of her head shaved, but a couple of hanks of blond hair remain here and there. $45 for that mutilated look. Her friend is dressed in black. Are these *no future* people? It's like being on Grant Street in North Beach at the end of the fifties when all those beat 'chicks' dressed in black and sat in the front windows of coffee shops so they could watch the tourists watch their existential angst. It was *smoking pot* then. Hey, in the forties, it was blowing tea.

Now it's ugly chic. Images of death. Skulls, chains, studs, swastikas, the residue of punk. Old Telegraph Avenue where's it's always the night of the living dead. Clones of Richard Hell roam these mean streets. Roving gang attacks. Competition for drug territories. Drive-by shootings. There's a girl in a blue jean mini-skirt. White reeboks. Her morning begins with a scone and a cappucino and four or five cigarettes. More women smoke than men these days. They've come a long way. It must be true. I read it in the paper. Rainy December. The students are gone. Six weeks holiday for the rich. They'll be back in late January to go on clawing their way up the old corporate ladder. College gives you the right to work in those megatoys that make up San Francisco's current skyline, those monuments to insurance and banking. You can be anything this time around; remember the old Leary speech? You can even be a banker if there are any banks left open after the Bush era.

How about this Talk Show competition going on? Grampa Donahue and Auntie Oprah vs those bad boys Mort Downey, Jr. and Geraldo Rivera? All the way from P. T. Barnum to the Late Night Show. Freaks and celebs galore. Women who have murdered their children. Rapists. Incest victims. Guys who weigh 800 pounds. Funny, huh? A lot of this stuff was going on in the underground comix a decade back. In titles you probably never heard about like Tom Veitch and Greg Irons' DEVIANT SLICE.

Did you know Paul Krassner is still doing THE REALIST? I found a copy of the Summer 1988 issue in the basement at Moe's. $2 from Box 1230, Venice, CA 90294.

BABYFAT crawls on. I started this minizine about the residue of pop culture back in 1978. There are 63 issues to date and you can get the latest (62 and 63) for a buck and a two-bit stamp. Or you can send five stamps and save me a trip to the post office. Panels are welcome (same size as printed) and I'll send you a couple of copies if your gag is used. Best read a few copies before you send something, because I want the art or writing to fit in with the tone of the zine. I don't return anything, so send a clean xerox copy. If you want to make some money, try Dave Sim. I see that he has a page available in his new CEREBUS bi-weekly reprint comic. He's reprinting the early issues of CEREBUS. Get a copy to check out the details.

Steve Leialoha did the art for TRYPTO THE ACID DOG by Bill Murry and Miguel Ferrer. Following in the tradition of Krypto and the Bionic Dog and other super canines, this one is fun.

So is Renegade's new romance comic, a love comic with stories designed with an E-C twist.

WEIRDO 24 has Bill Griffith dealing with the angst of himself as social critic.

Edd Vick's FAN'TOONS uses panels and written stuff. A copy is $1.75 pp from him at 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105. He trades, so send him one of yours.

Ray Zone just published a 3-D comic on the Presidents. Ought to be some good stuff in there.

WIMMEN'S COMIX 13 might give you some insight into the way women think about things. If you have time, I recommend Susan Brownmiller's FEMINITY. If you're a woman, you probably already know it all, but it's not certain.

SUBURBAN NIGHTMARES comes to an end with #4 from Renegade and it's been an interesting mini-series. I actually read it all.

EL VIBORA 105 is $7 pp from J. M. Berengeur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. Check out the latest trends in Spanish underground art. Strong sex and violence orientation, heavily influenced by the pulps, film noir, and Dick Tracy among other things.

INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES OF DISHMAN 7 is 75¢ pp or $1 for 2 pp from John Macleod, POB 671, Geulph, Ontario, Canada N1H 6L3.

Ace Backwards' TWISTED IMAGE mag is $1.50 pp from him, 1630 University Ave, #26, Berkeley, CA 94703. Ace is into the Berkeley punk and street scene as is Bruce Duncan whose latest address is BEFP, 2425 College Ave. Berkeley, CA 94704. Bruce edits POINT DRAWN, and is working on a new HANK AND HANNAH comic book. If you are interested in the Berkeley art and poetry scene, it's covered in detail in Duncan's publications, probably more than anywhere else. We have a few papers around, but they tend to be pretty yuppoid, mostly adzines for all the crap only a handful of people can afford to buy these days. Fact is, you find the material that used to go into underground newspapers in little mags these days. Printing costs have inflated to the point where all of the papers are automatically in the hands of the capitalists and if you are an independent thinker you have to express yourself via xerox or small press.

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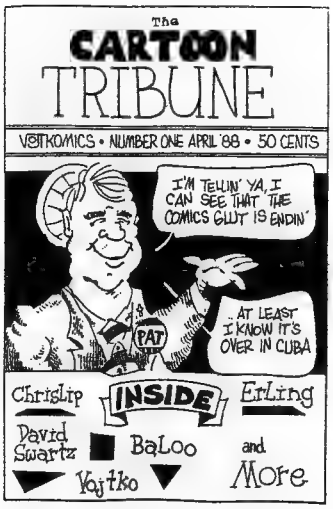
THE INTERVIEW FALLACY

Many more people are writing about comics these days and we are finally getting past the cliché article about comic book values which too often praises the dreck of the deep past at the expense of the more polished art of the present. With the increased interest in comic art and the people who perpetrate it, the interview has become predominant, which is nice, but an interview without background research has questionable historical value. In reality, the interview is extremely limited, dealing as it does with the opinions and memories of aa subject who may or may not know what he is talking about. There *are* cartoonist intellectuals; on the other hand, there are folks who draw quite well yet seldom read anything but comic books, their own and those of others. An interview is always colored by ego. It deals with what a particular artist is trying to hype at the moment, what he is willing to tell a reporter, what kind of mood he is in, and with what his publishers are willing to allow in print, given the eccentricities of their advertisers.

Senior cartoonists are rarely, if ever, college graduates. Most are the product of individual talent enhanced by mail order cartooning courses, which were widely advertised in the classified sections of pulp magazines during the twenties and thirties. Today's generation of cartoonists have some college and not a few are graduates. What this means to the reporter is simple. The older cartoonist is a fountain of nostalgic information about what it was like in the days of the Chesler or Eisner/Iger studios, how it felt to work in the sweat shops run by the syndicates and the animation studios, what the early cartoonists were like, the kinds of gags they pulled and the amount of booze they drank.

I remember reading Boody Rogers autobiography, HOMEWARD BOUND, expecting to learn something about Sparky Watts who was always a favorite of mine in the early forties. Rogers spent most of his book talking about drinking bouts with Zack Mosley and other friends and he barely mentioned Sparky Watts' name. To me, the character was important; to him, Sparky, a parody superhero, was just one of hundreds of strips he worked on and had no more or less significance than any of his others.



COMIX PLUGOLA

Mary Fleener's newest is CHICKEN SLACKS GOT SOUL. $2.50 PP from 309 Oceanview Ave, Encinitas, CA 92024.* From Randy H. Crawford, NICE DAY COMIX is $1.50 pp. 911 Park St. SW. Ask for Randy's list of mini-comix.* JOHNNY B. GOODE 2 is 35¢/stamp from Concrete Caverns Graphix, 702 Greenwich Ave., Suite 186, New York, N Y 10011.* Volume 4 of Fantagraphic's COMPLETE CRUMB series takes Crumb into the sixties. * PUMA BLUES has moved to Mirage. a company supported by four strong turtles, teenage mutant ninjas all. That title is now at #18.* EL VIBORA 108, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.

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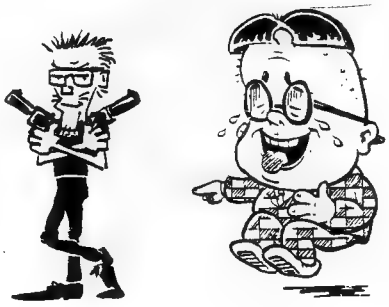


Today, the interview is a sales technique and the artist is a product to be peddled along with his character. The authors seen on talk shows are peddling their books the way drummers used to peddle neckties on street corners. What is at stake? The sale of the going character or series, not the truth about anything. We're dealing with vested interests, bosses, owed favors, belated promises, and all the hustle and bustle that surrounds any entertainment in the electronic age, and there is no more intellectual honesty in the comic business than there is in any other business.

Artists compete. They do not love each other. Read the letter columns in the various hypezines. Artists lie to one another and they lie to interviewers and they have an ego just like yours. They are not likely to say anything that is going to cost them money or make them look bad in print. Privately, however, they will often say what they think. I recall many occasions in my life as a reporter when I heard one artist insult another, and I'm not talking about amateurs. I'm taking about men who are internationally famous for their newspaper strips. Behind the scenes, you hear the real critiques. *Look at that anatomy. Son-of-a-bitch never learned how to draw. Look at the way he faked this panel. Look at this shit. Nothing but traced photographs. Without a light box, this character would be washing dishes at Jack-in-the-Box.* Interviewed on a panel at a convention, the same artist would have nothing but praise for his peers. Why not? That's human nature. Criticism in private, loyalty in public. What business would survive if it were otherwise?

An artist can't tell you something he doesn't know, but when you ask, his status is at stake; being a cartoonist, he *ought to know* so he will make up an answer that sounds good, confident that most interviewers will print what he says without checking his facts. Comics pubs tend not to have research assistants the way TIME has and though comics criticism is on the upswing those in the field still retain an inbred feeling that comics are not worth *that much time.* The reader is in the same frame of mind. He likes to read all that art hype, but he isn't going to check out the artist or writer, because he doesn't have the time or the interest. It's a game of questions and answers like a tv quiz show; it's entertainment, and the facts are irrelevant.

Does the artist *remember*? No more than anyone else. If he keeps a diary, he can look up when he did this or that story, but most of the day to day inkers just do the pages and live their lives. The stories tend to flow together, particularly if they are about a continuing character, and who cares when this or that story ran? Big deal. It's fan-boy trivia. You hear the questions from the audiences at conventions and this fan only asks them because he heard someone else ask them at the last con. *How long does it take you to ink a page? Didn't so and so do that last couple of pages in the umpteenth issue of the Incredible Bulk?* It's not quite as bad on some of the younger artists who are used to all this bologna by now, but consider the older artists who may have done that stuff thirty or forty years ago. Ask Jack Kirby about a particular story concerning the Newsboy Legion or even Kamandi and you will really be participating in theater of the absurd. I suspect Jack has to check his own history from time to time if he worries about that sort of thing. What Jack would remember and tell you would be when he stopped working with Joe Simon, because cartoonists like normal people remember their friends and co-workers much

longer than the product they were turning out from week to week at the studio.

A writer in this field, a comic historian, has to get into the habit of doing research, *primary research*, and get away from the neverending round of personal likes and dislikes, the war of personalities. After all, the writer and the artist are in a related business. One needs the other. Comic books depend on story as much as art. Ask any kid. Whether or not the comics business needs critics or historians is open to dispute. After all, the industry has its own built-in hype department, but the inner sanctum must always present Schlockman as the greatest thing since Superman and any real critic would find himself sliding down the laundry chute with Julie Schwartz' soiled white shirts.

I fell into writing comic criticism back in the early seventies. It was unintentional. I wasn't interested in comic books at the time. I was writing for underground newspapers and I met Roger Brand on my rounds and did an article about his work. He passed me along to other underground cartoonists, some of whom were friendly and understood my role as a reporter, many of whom didn't understand and rejected me as they would any outsider. I went from cartoonist to cartoonist, interviewing them, printing what they said in my COMIX WORLD columns in the underground papers. I took their word for things and didn't bother to check up on them. I didn't care. If they lied to me or put me on, it made them look bad when it was printed. It didn't bother me one way or another. I did so many different stories back them that I seldom spent more than a couple of hours on any one subject.

As I got to know the comix and the artists and began to develop an overview of what it was all about, I started to check on the facts, to research the history of comics, to read the various biographies and books of essays, and I became a lot more careful about what I put into print. *I started to ask questions about the questions.* to wonder why people told me things they knew weren't true. What I discovered was that each artist had his own view of how things had evolved, that underground comix, for example, had come from different regions of America and that each clique considered its own books *as important as or more important than* those done by any other group. These cartoonists denied being competitive while they were often fiercely competitive. When I started doing COMIX WORLD as a newsletter in 1973, I got into the middle of a lot of things. I knew that the underground titles were closed shops, that Crumb, Wilson, et al, didn't let anyone into ZAP, so when I started getting inquiries about ZAP and other books I told the newcomers the truth. They might get The Print Mint or Last Gasp to do a book of theirs if it was well drawn and held the interest of Bob Rita or Ron Turner, but they might as well save their postage and forget about submitting stories for the closed titles of these companies. I could have saved my breath, however, because most sent their stuff anyway. Hey, what did I know? Who was I? I was the person who saw the box of unread letters and artwork on Ron Turner's desk and knew that he seldom responded to any of it, but my readers *out there* could hardly know this.

I found myself in numerous bizarre situations, most of which I only understood later. I remember interviewing Greg Irons and Tom Veitch down in Stinson Beach shortly after Last Gasp had published their LEGION OF CHARLIES. Well, I didn't know anything about the book or the guys who had done it. Ron Turner gave me a copy of CHARLIES along with some other comix he had just published and suggested I talk to Greg and promote the book in my column. I drove out to Stinson and what did I find? Greg and Tom practically hiding out in this old aircraft hanger, both of them afraid that Charley Manson would send some of his hit people after them for what they suggested about him in LEGION OF CHARLIES. Greg had drawn caricatures of himself and Veitch on brown grocery sacks and that's the only way they would be photographed.

I wasn't sympathetic. I was, in fact, pissed off about the whole thing. I had driven all the way down there with a friend, thinking I was going to do a routine interview, take some notes, a few pictures, and spend a little time walking around on the beach. Instead, I found myself dealing with Greg's paranoia. I took a picture of them with the bags on their heads, but I never ran it. Manson's people had just massacred Sharon Tate and her friends down in Los Angeles, but from what I understood about Manson's philosophy he was out to kill rich people and make it look like Blacks did it so he could start a new civil war. I never thought he would go after a cartoonist. For all I know, the whole afternoon might have been a put-on, Greg and Veitch having a little fun at my expense.

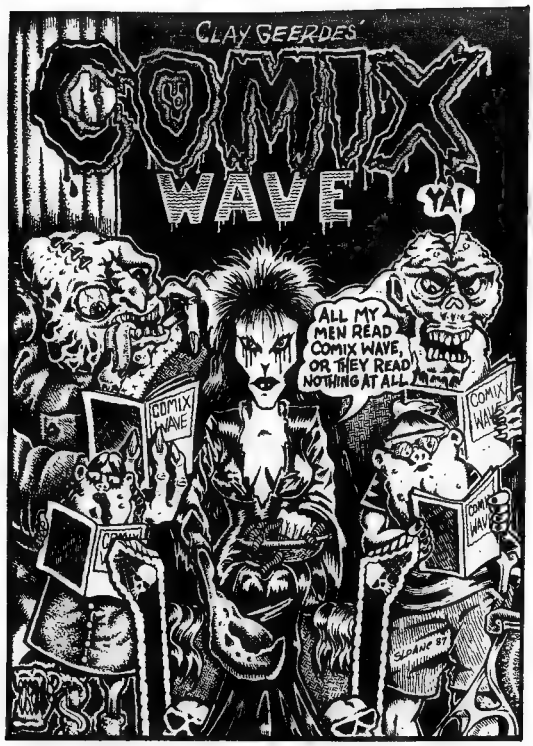
But being a reporter, you get involved with other people's lives. I often felt like an intruder which is probably why I drifted away from the business and into research. I began to dislike being around people and dealing with their personal problems, while retaining the ambivalent status of a reporter. I was a part of things, yet I was still an outsider. There were times when I wanted to act as a friend, yet I was rejected as simply a member of the press. It was as though someone in my line of work could not be a friend. My attitude was positive, or so I thought; I just wanted to help cartoonists get some publicity so they could make a living drawing and putting out comix, but my motives were often misinterpreted.

After all, there is some validity to telling someone's story when that person is not a writer and cannot tell it for him or herself, but when the opposite is true, the situation becomes more complex. Before Max Scherr, founder and editor of the Berkeley BARB, died, I used to try to get him to do an interview with me. I wanted to tell his story. Well, Max had in mind telling his own story, which was valid; he was always a writer, but he died in the meantime and the story went untold. Doubtless, there is someone going through his letters and diaries, etc., and one day we will see a biography of this seminal underground figure, but it will carry someone else's byline, perhaps someone who knew him a lot less well than I did.

I think the best interviews are done by groupies, folks who just hero worship without any sense of history. If I become involved in an interview with someone and I find out they know less than I do about their own field I have misgivings and question the validity of the entire situation. On tv, you wonder why everyone is so articulate, but the answers to the questions are right there on the monitor in front of them, so you have a couple of people reading a script to you. It's not like that when you go out with a note pad or a tape recorder and try to work up something that will look good in print. Some people have content, but they are simply not verbal. They have to draw it, write it out, even put it on film or video tape. I have a hard time with interviews. If the subject says something ridiculous, I want to get into it, to call it like it is, not write it down. I'm not a shrink. I take the *interview* seriously and consider my *view* as valid as that of the subject. Why would I be there otherwise? *WHOEVER* can write his own article. I get really upset with the wimps I see on tv all the time, the people who never voice an opinion about all the lies they hear from the business men and politicians. I say, call them out. Talk back.

Of course, I'm my own man. They can't fire me.

For background on the Manson family, see Ed Sanders' THE FAMILY and Vincent Bugliosi's HELTER SKELTER. The comix done by Greg Irons and Tom Veitch are available from Last Gasp Comix in San Francisco. Charles Manson is still locked up in San Quenton.



COMIX PLUGOLA

I see S. Clay Wilson has done a cover for a recent album by THE ACCUSED called *MORE FUN THAN AN OPEN CASKET FUNERAL*. You learn a lot walking around looking in record stores. I still prowl around the Telegraph area in Berkeley. I used to know a lot of people, but most of them are gone now. The guys in the comic store are all strangers to me. It was a different scene when folks like John Barrett and Di Schutz were there and I felt like one of the family. It's all moving toward chain stores now. I'm surprised that hasn't happened already. A comic shop on your local mall. See the movie, read the comic, buy the toys. Roger Rabbit and Eddie Valiant become *Sam and Max* and *Moonlighting* metamorphoses into *The Maze Agency*. A Ninja Turtle in every pot.

I stopped by Cody's bookstore. Ken Lupoff has been responsible for getting a lot of comic art stuff shelved there. The store was firebombed a few nights ago, because someone ran a story about Cody's selling THE SATANIC VERSES. Ironic to me, since the store also sells THE KORAN and other religious books. It was total paranoia along the street and Cody's had a rent-a-cop shaking down people with backpacks before they could pass the metal detectors. Just like the airport. Or maybe your local high school. Don't laugh. They've had metal detectors in some of *our* local high schools for several years now, every since the crack competition escalated.

I didn't go into Cody's. Went down to Moe's instead. He was telling his employees that anyone who was concerned about working *during this period* should just tell him and he would take care of it. I think that's ethical. Just being in a bookstore after what happened at Cody's and Waldenbooks makes a clerk think about mortality.

That TIME has merged with WARNER BROTHERS brings us one step closer to total megalopoly.

On the street, it was drizzing. Not a real rain at all. A clean-cut young man was preaching Jesus to passing pizza-eaters through a small sidewalk amp. A street person stopped to yell SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP! but most people just chewed along. Lots of homeless people doing the doorway shuffle to keep ahead of the blues. Our cops used to wear khakis, but now they dress in blue. A black woman yells at the clerk in Mrs. Field's cookie joint. She wanted to see *someone higher up*. If he didn't like black people, blah! blah! The oppressed take out their frustration on those who are as oppressed as they are.

I still get the Comic Buyer's Guide in the mail. All that bickering about the Batman movie. Harlan Ellison and Kim Thompson calling each other names through third parties in the letters column. I don't know why Don Thompson publishes all that crap, but I guess CBG needs something to fill up the space between the corporate hype.

I noticed Ron Turner [Last Gasp] had published Diane DiPrima's MEMOIRS OF A BEATNIK, so I mooched a review copy. An interview took place between myself and DiPrima back in the early seventies. It was never printed. I don't remember exactly why, but a lot of the stuff I wrote for the Los Angeles FREE PRESS and other underground papers wound up in the files for one reason or another, usually space limitations. If they sold a few extra sex ads in those days, a stringer lost his space for the week. In DiPrima's book, I learned zero about Beat culture, but every tiny little detail about the poet's sex life. Ah, well, yesterday's stroke books are today's memoirs. If you are curious about sex from one feminine viewpoint, I suspect you'll enjoy this book much more than the work of Shere Hite, though you will probably raise an eyebrow here and there. All of her experiences seem to result in orgasms of Krantzian proportions. Whether this is reality or tongue-in-cheek fantasy, I'll leave you to decide for yourself. If you can't find the book in your town, write to Last Gasp and Ron Turner will send you his catalog. 2180 Bryant Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

WEIRDO 24 is in the stores with a nothing Crumb cover. Insides are much better with the highlight being a jam started by Gary Arlington back in 1972 published as the centerfold. The jams were big events at our early underground cons in Berkeley, probably the only place over and ug cartoonists drew side by side.

MOTORBOOTY 3, a nice mag devoted to music, art, nostalgia, and erotica, has an article and art by Robert Williams. $2.75 from POB 7944, Ann Arbor, MI 48107. And in SNARF 11, you'll find Rand Holmes' hilarious story LATEX LOVE along with Dennis Worden's rap on Fundamentalism and Crabman's graphic dissertation on California as seen through the eyes of you folks who don't live out here. Crabb, who did the JACKALOPE, is also working on ROCKERS for Rip Off Press.

ASTRAL 1, 2, and 3, all for $1 pp from Steve Shotwell, 38 Park Timbers, New Orleans, LA 70131.

Yes, I am still publishing a mini comic now and then and you are welcome to contribute if you like. BABYFAT 64 is the latest one out. 50¢/stamp. If you haven't seen any minicomix, a sampler is available for $3.50 pp. This includes 12 of the early CW minis. If you want to contribute, just send me a same-size xerox (3x4"). If I use it, I'll send you a few freebies. CW Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

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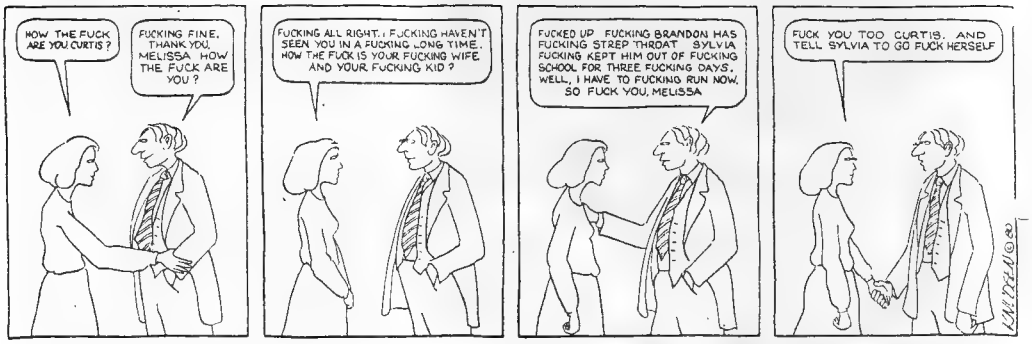
Re Fantagraphics THE NEW COMICS. Lots of errors here. Superman started in June of 1938, not 1937. The comic store movement began to gain momentum in the late sixties, not the late seventies. Ask John Barrett who had a store called COMICS WORLD in San Jose in 1968 and who opened THE BERKELEY COMIC ART SHOP with Bud Plant, Bob Beerbohm and John Campbell in 1972. Harvey Pekar is not a cartoonist. He's a writer who hires his work illustrated. COLLIERS and THE SATURDAY EVENING POST were middlebrow masscult mags. I never considered them "highbrow" and don't know anyone who did. Criticism of violence in the comic books was in progress as early as 1947 when Fredric Wertham was making the rounds of the PTAs with his canned lecture on juvenile dilenquency and the whole thing was over by the mid-fifties, the major-ECs gone, etc. Comic fans probably never gave it a thought, since they only started to think of themselves as a group when they got together in the huckster rooms of Science Fiction conventions circa 1960-61. The term Graphic Novel was coined by Jack Katz and used in relation to his FIRST KINGDOM. It was not being used by Marvel or any other company in 1975 when Jack began his work. Now, of course, it has been swiped as a label along with a lot of the ideas and material in Katz' books. What 13 issues of ZAP? We're still waiting to see #12. It's Zodiac Mindwarp, guys, and It's *Don*, not *Ron* Baumgart.

I consider THE COMICS JOURNAL a fanzine and CBG an adzine. The interviews in THE NEW COMICS are worth reading for the insight they give into the attitudes and values of the artists, but I fail to understand the validity of the opinionated diatribe that introduces a book, which is going to be bought by people who are into comics already, not by those hypothetical outsiders Groth thinks he's addressing, They wouldn't know anything about the subject and would not understand the issues to which he is reacting.

I would agree with the Thompson/Groth critique of Ellison in TCJ, but suggest that they apply the same standards to their own publications. I recall one time in the past when I corrected some misinformation on ug comix that appeared in TCJ and instead of printing my corrections I was called

OLD FRIENDS



names by the editor. I've had the same experience with other writers and realize it's more ego than scholarship. I would like to see the sources cited in comic criticism and I am following that practice in CW. Those who are serious about getting the correct information into print and into the libraries for future scholars have to get beyond their ego and accept that they will be lied to more often than told the truth and that they will have to go for the correct information by refering to the primary and secondary documents. If, for instance, there were footnotes and a bibliography in the Encyclopedae of comics, one could trust them, but there are not and one cannot.

Personally, I welcome correction. If I print an error, I like to know about it so I can correct my files. Invective has its place, I guess, in stand-up comedy where it fulfills a satiric function, but I think it is out of place in comics criticism. When the people who are respected and looked up to in the profession take to insulting one another before large audiences at comic conventions, they lose my respect, and I suspect they lose that of many of their other readers as well.

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David Nadel's latest is NEANDERTHAL TIMES 1 and it is 50¢/stamp from me. A critique of our weird political climate. Dave Lippman coined one of the major diseases of our era as Pentagonorrhea, a malady caught by screwing too many other countries. Dave is on the comedy circuit and I caught his act when he played Ashkenaz in early March. His *George Shrub* put the finger on the illusive invisible man who now lives in the White House.

From Diane Drutowski, you can get your copy of MICHIGAN 49 MIN. CLEANERS #1, a fat mini with lots of funny bits. $1.50 pp. 2412 Galpin, Royal Oak, MI 48073.* D and J Tompkins" HEALTH is a well-drawn newave in 6x8 format with lots of pages. $2.50 pp from 214 Cole St., San Francisco, CA 94117. That's out in Haight-Ashbury country, folks.

Guy Colwell's DOLL is a three issue series from Rip-Off Press.

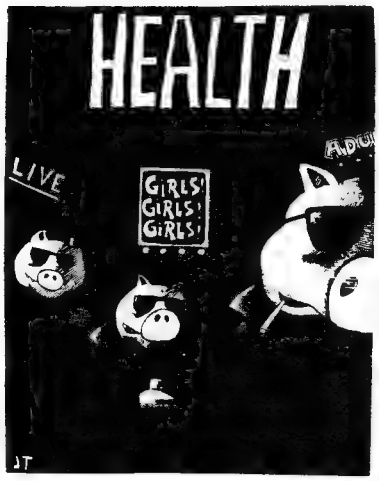
THE PUMA BLUES has been collected in book form by Mirage Press.

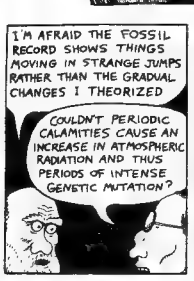
El Vibora 106 is $7 pp from J. M. Berenguer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. #107 is the big Christmas Special and is $10. Check out one of this amazing mags. Lots of exotic art and erotica.

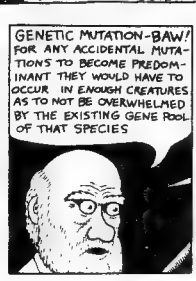
ZABAWNY 10 ends that series by Carole Sobocinski, POB 3433, Merchandise Mart Sta. Chicago, IL 60654. $2 pp. DZ.

FAN'TOONS 28 is $1.50 from Edd Vick, 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105.

JAZZ IN PARIS and RUFFLED FEATHERS. Both for $1 and a stamp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Cambridge, MA 02238.







COMIX WAVE

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BENNY'S SHORT STORY

The first time I saw Benny he was charcoal broiling cheeseburgers in a coffee shop in Fresno, California. He had heard about me from some of the students who hung out at his place, so he talked to me about what was going on, which was a lot of drugs and rock music at that time. Buried in the valley, Fresno managed to get a lot of fall out from the Bay Area on one side and Los Angeles on the other. The students at the college were mostly locals, but a great many had been sent there against their will by parents who were afraid of all the strange things they saw in progress in the cities, things like Be-ins and love-ins, kids dropping out of school and taking acid, growing their hair long, looking with distrust upon anyone over thirty. Fresno State was little more than an advanced high school during the time I taught there. There were a handful of students in open revolt, but most were trying to get into the same sororities and fraternities their parents had belonged to. Benny's coffeehouse was a hang out for folk singers and poets. It was the place to pick someone up for a quickie in those pre-AIDS days when *the pill* had freed everyone from the fear of pregnancy and unwanted early marriage.

Benny was a college man. He had a wife and two children and a house and the coffee shop. He wanted to write and he talked a lot about writing as did most of the folks who graduate from English departments and find themselves in other lines of work. I liked him. Always got in a few words with him when I was there to read poetry or do a play or just have a snack. I missed him when I left Fresno and moved on to Sonoma State.

It wasn't until after I had quit teaching and was freelancing for various papers and magazines that I ran into Benny again. I was working free for John Bryan who had started the San Francisco PHOENIX, publishing a lot of reviews and things. That may sound strange, but a lot of us did that sort of thing for a reason. The role gave us access to a lot of scenes. We got into everything free. We got comp copies of books and records and we were invited to the promo parties thrown by Warner's and Fantasy and many of the other outfits that were farming musicians in the Bay Area during those years. At the parties there were lots of girls and, more important to many of us, all the food we wanted to eat. So we got paid pretty well for knocking out those columns of hype for Bryan and Max Scheer and Art Kunkin. Still, the guys on the regular dailies got the same *and they got paid well, too.* So we still did our share of complaining. I got $20 an article from the LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS and I learned that Art bought his wife, Valeria, a new Mercedes, then when she totalled it, he bought her another one! Well, he could afford perks like that because guys like me were filling the paper with writing and taking peanuts for the legwork. We weren't happy when we found out about the money coming in through the ad departments of those papers and we were disillusioned when there was never any mention of a raise in pay for the writers or the artists.

This is not a story about all of that shit, just some background so you will understand what happened when I suggested to Benny that he give one of his stories to John Bryan for the PHOENIX. Benny, when I met him again, was cooking at a restaurant in Berkeley. I went in there to have some eggs one morning and there he was. He sat down and we reminisced about the Fresno days and he told me he had split with his wife and kids and was now married to an artist and living in Berkeley. She was about 19. Benny was closing in on forty. He was still writing, however, and he told me some of his stories and I told him about the PHOENIX and my drama reviews, etc. Benny didn't have a publisher, of course. Who ever had one of those? He wanted to see his name in print. I knew that. Once you get used to it, you have to keep on. I've been in print for nearly 20 years now. It's a habit you can't break without feeling death closing in. To be is to be in print. Well, I told Benny I would be happy to give one of his stories to Bryan for possible use in an issue of the PHOENIX and after some chit chat I did. I did not realize what the cost would be.

You understand, I had been in the business for a long time and was used to having my copy cut to fit a publisher's space. I knew how pop writing worked and I was no longer upset if I found a line changed here and there. When I started, I was just like Benny. Those were my fucking words and they were holy and how dare anyone change them! What did an editor know? Well, I've been an editor myself now and I've changed or shortened here and there to fit space and I know both sides and I am no longer that hard to deal with. I now think of the pop stuff as copy and if a word is changed here or there, so what? The meaning is usually retained.

John Bryan *always* changed things to suit himself. He would rewrite the same way he had when he was working for a straight paper, so I should have known Benny's story would come out in print sounding more like Bryan than Benny, but *Benny* didn't know that and when he saw the printed piece he was devastated, destroyed. It was like the guy's life's blood had been spilled right there in the restaurant. Now Bryan wasn't there to see any of that agony. He was over at his house thinking about the next issue and as far as he was concerned he had done *Benny* a favor by getting his name in print for the first time and he had done *me* a favor because Benny was a pal of mine. Sitting in the restaurant in front of a Benny red-faced with anger, all of it directed at me, I had one of those

COMIX PLUGOLA

EL VIBORA 110, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.* David Nadel's NEANDERTHAL TIMES 1 is 50¢/st from Comix Wave, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

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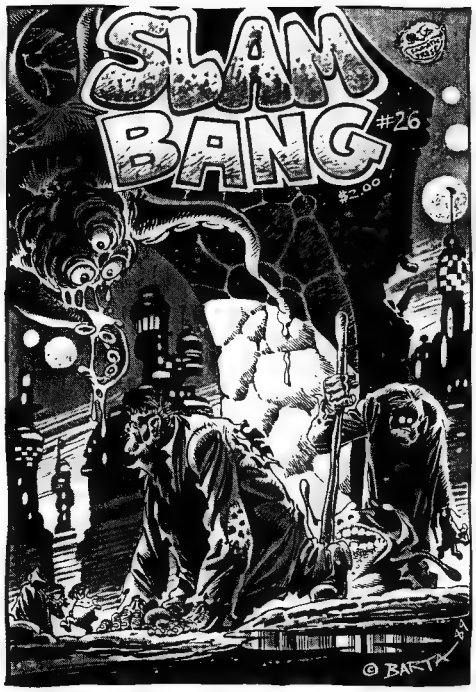
epiphanic moments James Joyce talked about. I had made a mistake. Benny was a cherry and I had sold him out to Genghis Khan. To me, his story was basically the same. Actually, John was a pro and he had improved some of it, made it less sentimental and emotional, which Benny would realize some years later when *he* had more experience, but at that moment I had to deal with a man who felt Bryan and I had fucked him royally and made him a laughingstock in front of all his friends.

I had lost a friend recently refound and I had to change restaurants.

I never saw Benny again. I think I mentioned the whole thing casually to John Bryan, but it really didn't mean any more to me than it did to him. When you are putting out a weekly, you are already into the next week before this one's issue gets back from the printer. We were into another issue and the Film Festival or something was going on so there wasn't time to worry about Benny's story. At the time, I probably told Benny that I didn't have anything to do with editing his story, so why was he coming on so strong with me, why didn't he just call Bryan up and lay all that shit on him? I don't remember the details, just the outcome. I had tried to do a favor for a friend and it had not worked out. Maybe it was partly my fault, but I don't really think it was. I think Benny was just an idealist as many academic writers are and when he was forced to confront the real world of print, he couldn't handle it. As the years went by, I became more and more detached from my own writing and these days I seldom see it printed. I just put the checks in the bank and go on to the next idea. When I want my own words preserved I put them in this newsletter.

You want to say it your way, you have to pay the printer. -Clay Geerdes

ACID MAN SOCIETY#8



SLAM BANG!

Allen Freeman's SLAM BANG continues. #26 has a nice cover by Hilary Barta and internal material by John Howard, Morgan Lloyd, Scott Nickel, Jim Burke, and others. $2.75 pp gets you a copy. Ask for Allen's list of publications.

ADVICE TO THE LOVELORN

Two two rich Midwestern yentas who hide behind the names of Ann Landers and Dear Abby are actually the twin daughters of a Russian Jewish immigrant named Abraham Friedman. Pauline Esther "Popo" Friedman Phillips and Esther Pauline "Eppie" Friedman Lederer grew up on Jackson Street in Sioux City, Iowa, my own home town. Both attended Morningside College, but dropped out when they married. You can read the story of their lives in DEAR ANN, DEAR ABBY by Jan Pottker and Bob Speziale (New York: Dodd Mead, 1987).

Eppie got into the advice business first when she took over the Ann Landers column for the Chicago SUN-TIMES in October of 1955 shortly after the death of Ruth Crowley. The column, consisting mostly of advice to the lovelorn, originated in 1942, and was trademarked by the SUN-TIMES on October 8, 1946. Ann Landers was a fictitious name, and Eppie didn't own it until the newspaper gave it to her in 1965. Popo on the other hand, copying her sister's lead, sold her advice column to the San Francisco CHRONICLE and registerred DEAR ABBY as her trademark. The first column ran on January 9, 1956. Born July 4, 1918, the popcult twins will be 71 this summer.

COMIX PLUGOLA

From Randy H. Crawford, UG THE BARBARIAN 3. 50¢ pp. 911 Park St. SW. Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241. Crawford pokes fun at the og comics in a mini-way. Ask for Randy's list of mini-comix.* EL VIBORA 109, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.* Scott Stevens has two new ones. V. D. CAGE 8 ($1 pp) and HEAVEN IS DEEP, MR. FIX (75¢ pp). 8220 Research Blvd., #114-B, Austin, TX 78758. * LES POIRES is 50¢/stamp from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Harvard Square Sta, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Robert Pasternak returns to CW with ACID MAN SOCIETY 8. 50¢/st from Comix Wave, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Looks like Gary Trudeau has finally succumbed to the Crumbic influence. Mr. Butts lineage certainly goes back to the halycon days of Tommy Toilet. To my knowledge, Gary's reference to ZAP COMIX in the April 22 DOONESBURY strip marks the first time ZAP has been a referent in a daily strip. Hey, it only took 22 years, huh? Origin of ZAP. It was the sound made by a Buck Rogers Disintegrator Pistol (see a 1934 ad).

Saw those bondage panels from X-MEN on the news on tv last night. Pretty cheesy stuff for the vidfreak and whopper gang, but, fact is, most of the people I used to sell X-MEN to when I worked at a comic store were old enough for ladies in black underwear. Some woman was really upset though and she's taking her case to congress. While she's at it, I wonder if she has ever noticed those Macy's and Emporium underwear ads, but I suspect her peculiar consciousness singles out comic books as the cause of her son's interest in sex. Hey, it's those cereal and soft drink ads on the tube, Mom. That's why all the boys hang out in grocery stores these days.

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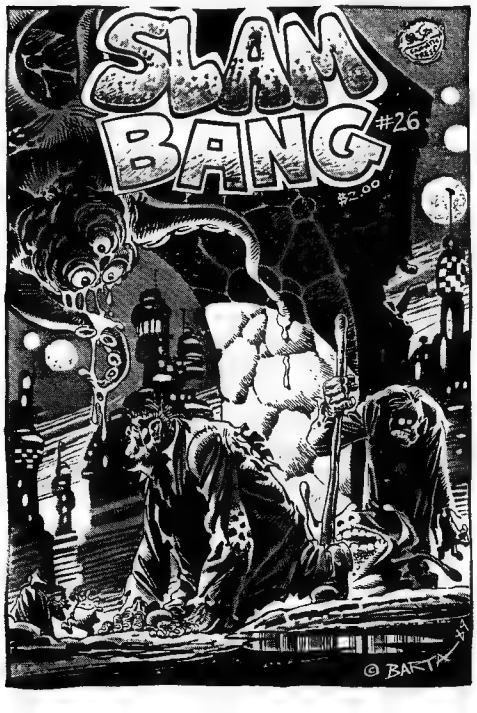
JAKA'S STORY continues in CEREBIS 120. A lot of dressing, undressing, and rainwater in that one. Nice issue. Aardvark-Vanaheim, POB 1674, Station C, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2G 4R2.

Fan-Atic Press has come of age under Allen Freeman and will soon be doing regular sized comic books. SLAM BANG proved a success and some of the recent books I have received from Allen are filled with impressive newcomers. I enjoyed Cary Lee Baker's VIDEO BLUES 1 [$1.75 PP.], THE ANARCHY OF KILLER CAIN [$2 pp), ALIEN BONDAGE [great sex art by Lee Burks--Age statement required on most ug and newave books, over 18 . $3.25 pp.] The CAPTAIN OPTIMIST series is written by T. M. Maple and drawn by Allen Freeman. I have 2 issues and have seen the cover ad for a fourth. $2.25 pp on those. SLAM BANG 26 [see illo] has a nice horror cover by Plastic Man artist Hilary Barta. *I have done a piece on Hilary's series, but am holding it up for later publication because I don't have all the information in yet.*

Once you get the comic habit, it's hard to break and those who leave often come back. Two of these are Dan *Book of Art* Taylor and Jamie *Bill Shut* Alder. Dan returns with a mini NEWAVE SHORTOONZ 1. 50¢/stamp from him at 1833 Guntle Road, New Lebanon, OH 45345. Dan is working on a new issue of FRIED BRAINS for CW. Alder's latest is INDUSTRIAL TOILET PAPER 3 [$1.75 PP. 24816 Aden Ave., Newhall, CA 91321.] Bob X, Mike Urban, Mike Roden, & others feature in ITP 3.



Probably the longest lasting high school cartooning group, Randy Paske's gang is still at it. Latest mini from him is Gary Fields' DOG COMIX 2. 50¢/stamp. The fattest mini-comic I've seen yet is HSC's MISC! 28. Huge!. Cover by Matt Feazell. If you want to find out why "high school is the tenth level of hell," get one of these. $3.25 pp. 656 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741.

Quentina De Cat and Quentin Lee have made a documentary film about Telegraph Avenue appropriately called TELEGRAPH. It was shown in Berkeley, May 8, and is likely to make its way onto the video circuit before long, so look for it. This is *The 20th Anniversary of the People's Park War* so there is a lot of rhetoric floating about. A Catholic group drove a large trailor onto the park a week ago and opened a People's Cafe to feed the homeless. It was still there this morning (May 16, 1989). The university wants the cafe moved three miles away. They want to protect all those well-to-do students from the likes of the poor and downtrodden who lost their jobs and homes under Reaganism.

WEIRDO 25 is out from Last Gasp. Lots of new stuff, including a rather mellow graphic rap from Crumb [see illos].

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Bill Mauldin

Several of Bill Mauldin's postwar editorial drawings showed up in his FBI dossier because they attacked the methods of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. This cartoon appears in "Back Home," one of his three books that were chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Bill Mauldin told Herbert Mitgang that Mitgang's article in The New Yorker on FBI dossiers resulted in this drawing.

Ever wonder why there have been so few postage stamps with authors on them? Well, there was a Steinbeck stamp, but it didn't come easy.

Herbert Mitgang took advantage of the Freedom of Information Act and secured the FBI files on numerous American writers, playwrights, poets, and historians, discovering in the process that John Edgar Hoover had been keeping tabs on nearly anyone who had ever had a thought in the United States. So that's okay, huh, National Security and all that? Perhaps, but *just having an FBI file symbolizes guilt of some kind to most people, particularly those doing the hiring in this country and hundreds of people lost their jobs and were blacklisted because some anonymous informant told one of Hoover's anonymous informants that he or she was a member of this or that Communist Front organization.* Just because Hoover didn't like Elwyn Brooks White's comments in a New Yorker column does not make White a subversive. It just makes him another of a long list of people who had an aversion to Hoover's particular form of subversion and blackmail, which continued with impunity under a number of presidents.

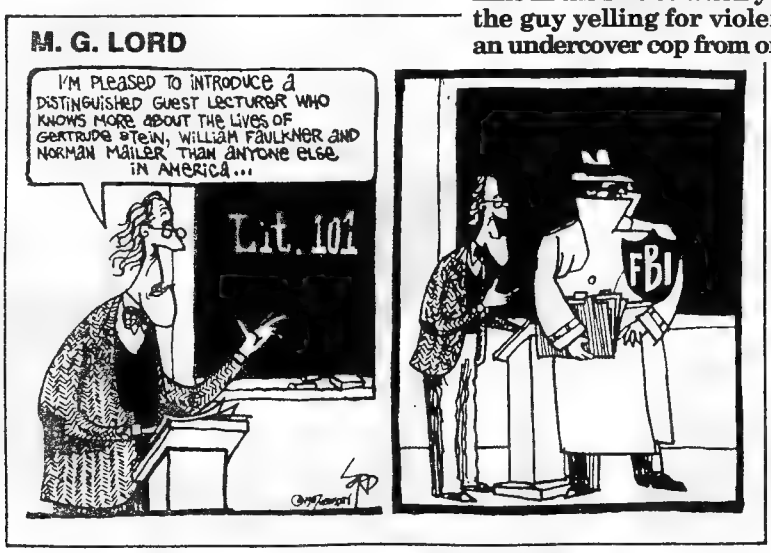
No evidence was ever found that proved any of the major writers' organizations in this country were ever fronts for anything other than the writers in them who were concerned about such things as protecting their copyrights. The only infiltration of the ranks of writers seems to have been by the FBI, so we ought to refer to these organizations as FBI fronts, huh? Like in the sixties when you knew the guy yelling for violence was an undercover cop from one of the dozen or so clandestine organizations which infiltrated every student group from SDS to SNCC.

U.S. Postal Service

Despite the fact that the Army denied John Steinbeck a commission as a lieutenant during World War II because of his FBI dossier, he was honored in 1979 with a postage stamp.

What the FBI did throughout the forties and fifties was assassinate character right and left. If you said Hoover sucked, he set up a file on you and if a name check was done as it always is in the case of federal employment, the fact that you had a file kept you from getting the position. Neat, huh? Class maintenance in America. Hoover was suspicious of all writers and intellectuals, so all had files and even when this whole practice was called into question in the seventies, the files were neither corrected nor destroyed. Hey, if they had been you wouldn't get *anything* from a Freedom of Information request, right? Mitgang's book lays the whole rotten scene out for the reader. Hoover was treating patriots like cartoonist Bill Mauldin as though they were traitors! When Rex Stout made the FBI a villain in THE DOORBELL RINGS for keeping all those blackmail files, Hoover tried to stop the libraries from shelving the book.

DANGEROUS DOSSIERS is out in paperback this month, so you can check it out for yourself. It's always a good idea to keep an eye on those organizations which devote so much time keeping their eyes on you. C. G.



GUY COLWELL'S DOLL

Please, God, make me into the doll that everyone wants me to be.
-Gelsey Kirkland. DANCING ON MY GRAVE.

"Misha [Barishnikov] had begun to transform the company, getting rid of dancers whom he considered either too fat or too old. His preference in ballerinas was simple and straightforward: pretty, young, thin, long legs, good feet (271)."

Guy Colwell's recent DOLL has an erotic surface, but contains a number of intellectual ideas and paradoxes. Guy illustrates the attitudes of many different men toward what is basically an android, an upgraded version of the plastic inflatable love dolls which have been sold in erotic bookstores for years. No man can resist Doll. All have sex with her at one time or another. Created for an ugly man, Doll is destined for other things. Colwell suggests that this is what most men want out of a woman, sex with neither response nor responsibility. Doll can be manipulated into any position and is nothing but a beautiful receptable. When not in use, she just lays around. She never asks for anything or needs anything. She neither participates nor relates.

If all a man needed was sex, Doll would be perfect, and for some men perhaps she is perfect. The fascinating thing about this story is seeing Doll being used while knowing she is an android yet being aware at the same time that she is no more or less human than any other drawn character. The others in the story do not look any more real than Doll. Hey, these are all comic characters here and we have only Guy's written words that tell us Doll is a latex being while the guys around her are flesh and blood. Folks who missed the first issue will not know that Doll is a doll. They will see this lovely toy being passed from man to man and the numerous sexual scenes will brand the comic as pornography whatever the rationale of the artist and publisher.

Guy Colwell entered the world of underground comics back in the seventies with his political and erotic stories in INNER CITY ROMANCE. A painter, Colwell has shown at various galleries around the Bay Area and his paintings reflect the various lifestyles prevalent in the region. I don't want to define Guy's style here and I won't. His paintings are brutally honest and it is perhaps that honesty which has kept him from a wider audience. He does not paint the kind of land and seascapes yuppies cover their walls with, the bland and boring stuff that is the bread and butter of the Geary and Sutter street art dealers.

Where INNER CITY ROMANCE dealt with relationships, DOLL deals more with male sexual fantasy, and I feel that men are not so much accused of being sexist as they are of being more intent upon the money they can make rather than the quality of their lives. Of course men want Doll. They want to have sex when and where and how they want it and when it is over they don't want to think about it until the next time the need arises. Doll never talks back. And there's the rub. Her silence is deadly. Ultimately, she becomes a monster, always sitting or lying there smiling. C.G.

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ISADOR STONE

Izzy Stone died June 18, 1989. He was born December 24, 1907, and spent his life doing research and trying to get the truth out to people. I first saw I. F. STONE'S WEEKLY in City Lights Bookstore in North Beach in San Francisco in the late fifties. Lawrence Ferlinghetti kept up with all of the little poetry mags and newsletters that preceded the underground comix of the sixties and seventies. They were down in the basement then and there were a few little tables and chairs there. You could go down and just sit around and read and no one bothered you or tried to sell you anything. A rare place. Izzy would have liked it and I'm sure he was there more than once. He published his newsletterfrom 1953-71 and it was certainly one of my influences. Izzy made the newsletter a viable form of communication. In his late 70's, he learned Classical Greek and wrote his final book, THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES. Thanks for all, Izzy.

COMIX PLUGOLA

"Adult commix [sic] as they are known are big news and big business." Oy vey. So sez the hype sheet I just got from Penguin Books. Seems Arte Spiegelman sold them on publishing RAW as a paperback. The first one is Vol. 2, #1. and it's $14.95 and has the shittiest cover I've every seen on a magazine, an insult to every cartoonist everywhere. On the other hand, there is some good stuff inside, including Charles Burns' Big Baby tale about the Kabala Bongas. If you can afford $15 comic books, go for it. RAW's not for you poor slobs, that's certain.

EL VIBORA 112, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.*

CEREBUS BI-WEEKLY 13 and 14 out, reprinting the early adventures of Dave Sim's aardvark. Aardvark Vanaheim, POB 1674, Station C, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2G 4R2.

Randy Paske's Latest minis are Gary Fields' DOG COMIX 3. THE CHROME DOME by Paul Tumey & Jim Gill. 50¢/stamp ea. HSC's MISC! 29 is $1.50 pp. 656 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741.

UNDERGROUND SURREALIST 5 is a rock and roll issue. $3.00 pp., POB 471, Cambridge, MA 02142.

ELF THE BARBARIAN 3 is $1 pp from Kenny Moran, 254 Young, Wpg, Man. Canada R3C 1Y9.

YUH C'N MAKE A LIL CLAY SNAKE is $1 pp from TKA Komiks, 3021 N. Southport, Chicago, IL 60657.

BOLT 3 is 50¢/stamp from Randy H. Crawford, 911 Park St., SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241. CHANTILLY LACE is 50¢/st from Randy.

HELL FOR LEATHER is $2.50 pp [8x10, mag format] from Tony Nesca, 751 Home St., Wpg, Man, Canada R3E 2C5.

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. . . We have reached a time when it is fashionable to accept anything, no matter how destructive, as long as if qualifies, in the clinging phrase of the prehistoric sixties, as *far out*.

John Rechy
THE SEXUAL OUTLAW, 1977

DIRTY WORDS

My mother is 82. She cannot handle dirty words. None of them. When I was eight-years-old I heard some boys talking about fucking on the playground at Huntington School in Lincoln, Nebraska, an institution of lower learning in which I suffered a great deal and for which I have no fond memories. Having lead a pretty sheltered life in the care of my Southern Mom, I did not know what fucking was. Since I had always been able to talk to her about things, I came home that afternoon and while she was making me a peanut butter sandwich I casually asked her what fuck meant. Imagine the sky clouding over and thunder rolling across the desert and a lightning bolt splitting the kitchen table in half and you will have a partial view of my mother's reaction. Words were things to her though I did not know it at the time and she felt attacked by the sound of the word fuck in our kitchen.

"Where did you hear that?"

"At school."

"From who?"

"Some boys."

"Well, I don't ever want to hear you say something like that again. And I don't want you hanging around those kind of boys."

"But--"

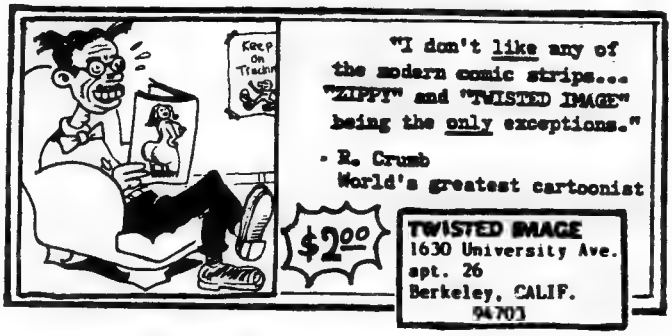
"No buts. I'm ashamed of you talking like that. I don't ever want to hear you say words like that around me."

Jeez, I didn't know what to think. Fucking must be something truly horrible to upset Mom like that. I still didn't know what it was, but I knew now that I wasn't going to find out from her. I also knew that there were things I would not be able to talk to her about, that our close relationship was over. Had she been rational about it and just told me what I was ready to know about sex I would have listened and gone out to play some baseball in the lot across the alley, but her negative and violent reaction was something I had not anticipated. It was a violation of the trust I had in her. I walked out of the kitchen feeling guilty about something I didn't understand. I hadn't done anything to warrant such a reaction. I felt truly wronged, and I was right.

Well, I'm not blaming my mother. She was an uneducated woman who did the best she could for her children and her reaction to dirty words was based on her own repressed childhood. It has not changed to this day. My sister put a vcr in Mom's condo apartment a couple of years ago, because she thought she would enjoy watching some of the new movies. Didn't work. She couldn't show Mom *any* of the newer movies, because all of them have sex scenes and dirty words. I have an aunt who is the same way. She loves the violence in the Clint Eastwood movies, yet she says she always skips over the sex scenes in the trashy novels she likes to read.

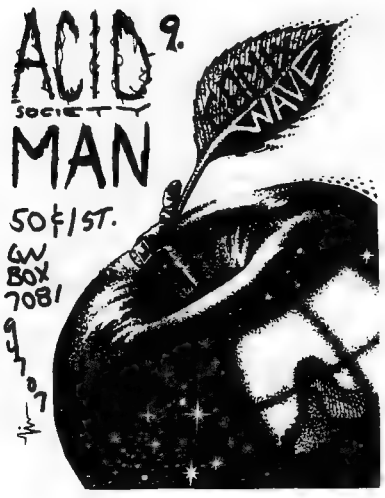
I grew up with dirty words. All the boys at school used them and I got into it right away. If you didn't, you were considered a geek or some other unpopular nonhuman thing. I would be walking up to Harold's to play some pinball and I'd meet one of the guys and he would say something like, "Hey, Geerdes, who shit in your face?" Today, the kids on WONDER YEARS call each other Butthead, or Buttface! I grew up with the Our Gang kids who never said anything real. Early radio and movie kids were always an extension of my parent's ideal for what kids ought to be. What I heard every day was "Well, who's that ugly shit over there? Fuck you, shiteater. Piss on you, you little cocksucker. Your mother chases troop trains with a mattress on her back. Your mother gave the football team a blow job last Friday night. Go to hell, you stupid cunt. Wanna match? My farts and your breath. My balls and your tonsils. My ass and your face. Izzat yer face er didjer pants fall down? Eat me like a cookie, nuts, balls, an' all. Can I come over and fuck yer sister tonight?"

So when I got home and my mother would asked how things went at school I always said *fine*. I didn't want to upset Mom with the real world out there, who got beat up on the playground, who got pushed downstairs after recess, who was fucked over by the teacher for something someone else did, who called her a whore; it was enough that I had to deal with that world all day. I was glad to get home and up to my room where I could check out my Captain Marvel collection and listen to my radio. C. G.

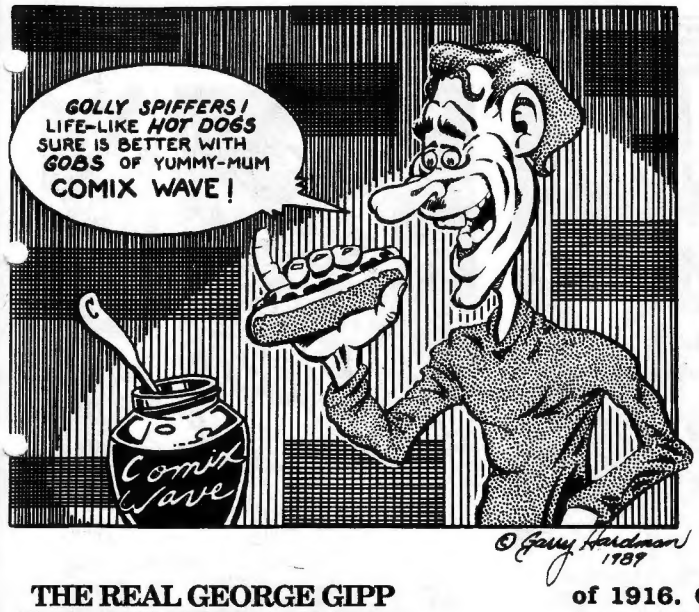


... Then again, I like the contrast between my lonely, loveless, hunted, and thoroughly disorderly existence and this middle-class family life.

Hermann Hesse
DER STEPPENWOLF, 1927



COMIX WAVE STRIKES AGAIN!



THE REAL GEORGE GIPP

How about an apology to the memory of George Gipp, the Notre Dame football player whose name has been stolen again and again by an ex-actor-cum-ex-president? When Coach Knute Rockne said *Let's win one for the Gipper* he sure as hell didn't have Ronald Reagan in mind. Time and again Reagan had to link himself with his superiors because his own record is so shabby.

George Gipp was born in 1895 in Laurium, Michigan. He was the son of Matthew Gipp, a Congregationalist minister. He played high school football at Calumet with Perce Wilcox, but never made the first string. He liked basketball better and played with the YMCA team. He was good enough at baseball to be signed by the Chicago White Sox just before he died, but he never lettered in baseball or basketball at Notre Dame. He never cared about such things, never tried for them. Francis Wallace said Gipp *just didn't seem to care much about anything, including fame when it came* (KNUTE ROCKNE, New York: Doubleday, 1960, p. 76). Gipp even wore his monogram sweater inside out, a fashion adopted by many of the other athletes.

George was a card player and a pool shark from early adolescence. He drove a cab for awhile after high school and got into Notre Dame on a baseball scholarship on the recommendation of Wilburt "Dolly" Gray, an Irish player who went on to the White Sox. Gipp was already 21 when he joined the freshman class of 1916. Coach Rockne saw him drop-kicking one afternoon and invited him to join the freshman squad. It was in a frosh game with Western Normal that Gipp kicked his 62 yard field goal, the second longest in the history of the game. Rockne said he had no doubt that Gipp *was going to be a world-beater, but a loner* (Jerry Brondfield. ROCKNE: THE COACH, THE MAN, THE LEGEND. New York: Random House, 1976. p. 87). Rockne had Gipp ape the style of Army's Elmer Oliphant. For Rockne, Gipp became the defensive Captain. He was a sharp tackler and the one player about whom it could truly be said that nobody ever completed a pass against him. His playing temperament was icy and when he was challenged on the field he operated at his peak, doing what he wanted to do. Wallace, who was a student at Notre Dame during Gipp's time, said he would have made a great quarterback in contemporary pro football.

Gipp never talked to writers. He had no interest in personal publicity and Rock could never get him to pose in a photograph with him. He loved to play, but he hated practice, and he never felt he had to atone for anything he did. He was the first Notre Dame man ever to make Walter Camp's first All-American eleven. Small by contemporary standards, Gipp was 6' 1" and weighed only 185 pounds.

At Notre Dame, Gipp lived in Brownson Hall. He worked as a hasher and table waiter. By 1918, he was living at the Oliver Hotel, where he often spent the evenings playing cards and shooting pool. He lived quietly and had no single close buddy or girl friend. He rarely dated. Study bored him and he often skipped study room. He was pleasant, but never cheerful (Brondfield, 88). In 1918, Gipp shifted from the College of Arts to Law. He missed too many classes and was bounced, but he took an oral exam and passed.

There is no question that Gipp was a strange self-destructive man. I have found no biography of him and what we know comes from biographies of Knute Rockne, a man who loved being a celebrity and cultivated publicity as ardently as Gipp avoided it. In one of his final appearances on the football field, Gipp played against Indiana in 1920 with a broken collarbone. Remember, we are back in the real world here, in a time when players wore no body armor to protect themselves. No shoulder pads. No face masks. Football developed out of rugby and the rules were constantly changing. Forward passes became legal in 1906. Players got numbers for the first time in 1915 in Pittsburgh. It was Rockne's publicity-seeking during the twenties that pushed the game into the national arena. The Fighting Irish won all ten games in 1924 to become National champions. A decade earlier, it was a major achievement to get four or five games played in a season. You didn't fly teams all over the country in jet planes in the teens. It was a train or bus ride and many early games were played in fields that were little better than cow pastures. Mud city.

George Gipp took sick in that 1920 season. A heavy smoker, he got strep throat from playing too hard in the weather and when Rockne visited him in the hospital

Satire is a dying art in this country. People want to be comforted..They want their *lifestyles* affirmed, not criticized!!

Bill Griffith
WEIRDO 24, 1988.

Note that the yearly Almanac published by the Hearst Corporation reports all of the non-events of the Reagan presidency, yet does not consider George Gipp worth mentioning. C. G.

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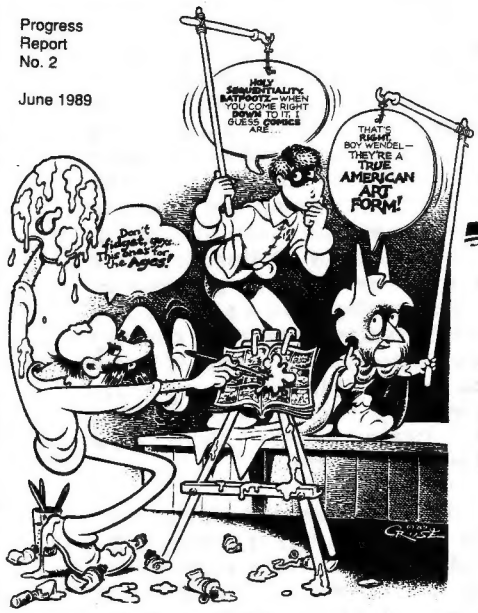
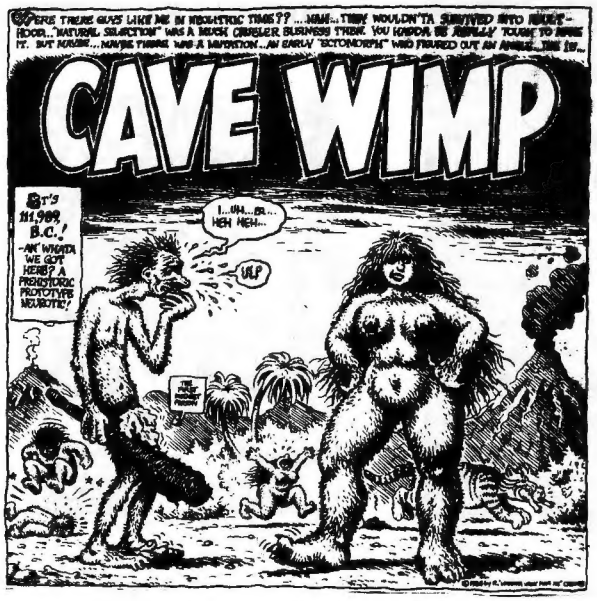
he said that Gipp said *Someday when the going was particularly rough against Army, Rock was to ask the boys to go out and win for Gipp* (Wallace, 87). Gipp died of pneumonia on December 14, 1920. When Notre Dame was up against a tough Army team in Yankee Stadium on November 12, 1928, Rockne gave his famous pep talk at the half, telling the team to go out and win one for the Gipper. It was Jack Chevigny who made the touchdown and said *that one was for the Gipper*. Notre Dame won the game 12-6.

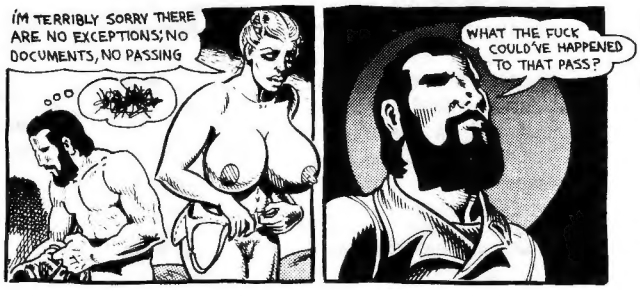
Ronald Reagan played the part of George Gipp in the Hollywood movie KNUTE ROCKNE: ALL-AMERICAN (1940), and while he was president during a dark period in American history it was common for news reporters to attribute to Reagan the fictional exploits of characters in his films. While George Gipp was an inspiration to hundreds of young athletes during his short life, Ronald Reagan was and is a disgraceful hypocrite. Those who have continually reiterated his lies and associated him with Gipp have been willing participants in the farce known as the Reagan Administration. In his 1974 TV MOVIES, Leonard Maltin said the *win it for the Gipper* scene had been cut from all tv prints due to legal complications with real-life Gipper's family.

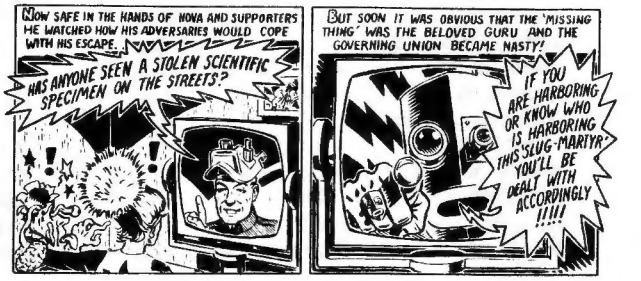
Be it known that there are people who know the difference between a real athlete and a clown who tries to steal someone else's thunder.

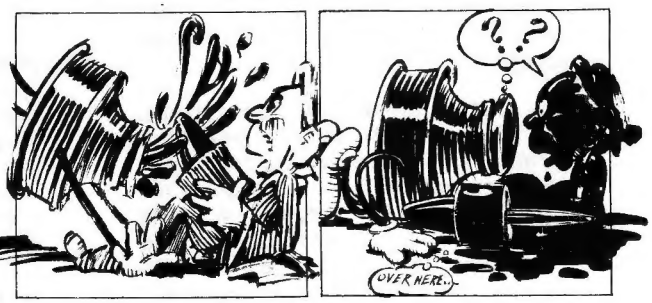


COMIX WAVE MINI-SERIES
FRIED BRAINS 27 (Dan Taylor)
WEIRD WABBITS 2 (GARRY HARDMAN)
BABYFAT 65. 50¢/stamp each. CW/ Box 7081, Berkeley, Ca 94707. Special thanks to Garry Hardman for CW & Babyfat logos.









COMIX PLUGOLA

EL VIBORA 111, your window into the underground psyche of Spain, is $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.*

David Nadel's NEANDERTHAL TIMES 1 is 50¢/st from Comix Wave, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Spread around you are panels from ZAP 12. Some truly amazing work by the original ZAP gang. ZAP began back in 1967 in the brain of Robert Crumb. By the third issue, he had decided to maintain the same group of artists in every issue. The title has passed through several publishers beginning with Apex Novelties and it is now published by Last Gasp Comix out of San Francisco.

I always knew Rick Geary would get more seriously involved in comic *books* and he has with a great children's story THE SECRETS OF THE JUNIOR CARROT PATROL [Dark Horse, 1989]. The story and concepts are attributed to Bob *Flaming Carrot* Burden.

What has Joe Zabel been doing? Well, he's teamed up with Gary Dumm to do a nice DZ. There are two issues of JANUARY MIDNIGHT [$1.50 pp ea, 12175 Valley Lane #203, Garfield Hts, Ohio 44125].Greg Budgett and Gary Dumm collaborated on KYSS OF DEATH and SHOOTY BEAGLE [1.50 pp from Zabel]. The Beagle comic features a dog who closely resembles Brad Caslor's Bob who was a distant cousin of Disney's Pluto. Shooty is the ultimate voyeur and he always gets satisfaction in this funny little nod to pin-up art. Age statement required for all these comix. 18 or over.

Howard Cruse did this cover for the San Diego Con report. The con is August 3-6, 1989, and Howard will be a guest. Information is available from POB 17066, San Diego, CA 92117.

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COMIX WAVE

WEIRDO 26, the beat goes on. Crumb has done a socially relevant piece this time instead of a big buns fantasy re-run. Very avant-garde depressing stuff. In the letters col we find that Terry Boyce has returned to Jesus, burned all her penis and bondage art, and is admonishing all you underground artists to change your ways or suffer hell and damnation. Hey, and if you're a televangelist, you can stay out of jail for being a thief by curling up in a fetal position and hallucinating. Hail, Hail rock and roll! The 90s are going to be a blast. Phoebe G. did a cute story about some nasty little girls who bury some boy's clothes and pee on them. Tsk! Tsk! I remember Little Lulu doing that sort of thing sans urine back in the forties. Little Who-Lu?

COMIX PLUGOLA

EL VIBORA 113/14, a double issue, has photos of all the artists at a party. $7 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain.*

CEREBUS BI-WEEKLY 18 and 19 out, reprinting the early adventures of Dave Sim's aardvark. Aardvark Vanaheim, POB 1674, Station C, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2G 4R2. CEREBUS 122 features the 9th installment of Jaka's Story.

Renegade Press has ceased publication for a time. I expect some of their titles will show up on someone else's list.

Eastman and Laird's TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES are everywhere. Big movie in 1990. Topp's bubble gum cards. Oy! TMNT 22 has a non-turtle cover though. Shocking. TALES of TMNT ends with #7 (Aug., 1989). The guys are going to focus on the main title.

HSC's MISC! 30 is $1.50 pp., 656 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741.

UNDERGROUND SURREALIST 5 is a rock and roll issue. $3.00 pp., POB 2565, Cambridge, MA 02238.

UG THE BARBARIAN 4 is 40¢/stamp from Randy H. Crawford, 911 Park St., SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241. Randy's BIG SISTER 1 is 50¢ /st and so is YOUR DIRTY LIL' COMIX 1. Adults only on most ugs and newaves so send your age statement with the first order.

An upcoming issue of Allen Freeman's SLAM BANG has Clay Geerdes spouting off on a lot of things in an exclusive interview. Allen runs the Fan-Atic Press, 157 Northwood Rd., Frankfort, KY 40601-1477. Send him a buck and get the latest catalog.

COMIX F/X is running a series of historical columns re my reminiscences of the underground and newave comic scenes. The first was a history of eight-pagers, the second about Gary Arlington's 7-centers and the early San Francisco Scene, and the third will be a history of Haight-Ashbury and the part it played in the history of underground comix.

Below: Betty in "Where's Betty", serialized in SKIN TWO.

THE REALIST LIVES. #110 is $2 from Paul Krassner, Box 1230, Venica, CA 90294. Paul will speak at the benefit for the memory of Abbie Hoffman in Berkeley at Ashkenaz, September 17, 1989. It's an evening gig. Call 525-5054 for details.

THE BETTY PAGES 4 has some other pin-ups inside. Boooo! Why should Betty share the spotlight with Steranko's Sheena swipe? You can get Betty at Comic Relief or Comics and Comix in Berkeley. They forgot to put the address in #4. Sorry.

Edd Vick is coming out with a series of comix, one of them featuring Steve Willis' popular MORTY THE DOG. Send Edd a buck and get his list and the rap on the new comix. 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105.

NEWAVE SHORTOONZ 2 is 50¢/stamp from Dan Taylor, 1833 Guntle Rd., NEW LEBANON, OH 45345.

Jerry Riddle has collected his SNOOKY [8 1/2 x 11, 30 pp.], $3 pp from him at 4126 San Roberto 2, Anchorage, AK 99508-2362.

I am selling some of my old ug and newave stuff to make room for new things so if you collect send me a wantlist and I'll make you an offer. Note to those concerned. The Kennedy price guide was done in 1983 and those prices do not reflect the current market, particularly on rare items. C. G.

Above: The cover to SHANNA SHE-DEVIL #1 (Dec. 1972).

COMIX WAVE 82. December, 1989.
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MAGIC IN THE COMICS

Magic has made a comeback via science in the eighties. When Billy Batson said SHAZAM! for the first time back in the early forties, a bolt of lightning flashed to earth and the newsboy was instantly transformed into Captain Marvel, a somewhat chubby parody of Superman. When Mandrake looked at an insect and said WORG GIB! that insect became a giant monster worthy of the Japanese horror films that were part of the fall-out from Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Mandrake worked his magic by making his commands in reverse English. In an late forties newspaper strip, Russell Stamm's SCARLET O'NEILL touched her left wrist with her fingers and became INVISIBLE SCARLET O'NEILL while in TICK TOCK TALES, a little girl named Judy found that everything she drew with her magic chalk came to life. Aladdin rubbed a lamp and a Genie magically granted the boy's wishes in the days of the Arabian Nights. Whatever King Midas touched turned to gold. There was Magic everywhere when I was a kid, and it was usually taken for granted. Hey, in Sunday school, Jesus was raising the dead, and walking on water. The transition to the funny papers was easy. SHAZAM! and I was an instant grown-up.

For a time, reality reared it's ugly head. After all, during a world war that killed millions of people and ended with one of history's most inhuman crimes, the simple fantasies from Sunday school and the funny books became inane. At the tail end of my childhood, an insane drunk named Joe McCarthy was on television accusing everyone who had ever had a thought of being a communist or a communist dupe. No wonder Elvis Presley came along and got all shook up.

Do you believe in magic? sang the Lovin' Spoonful. In the sixties, drug magic came along. People swallowed Orange Wedgies or Purple Haze or some other brand of LSD and experienced an intensity of perception that was comparable to magic. Indeed, the period was often referred to as the Magic Age in papers like the San Francisco ORACLE and Los Angeles FREE PRESS. Magic returned to the comics in Marvel's DR. STRANGE and in the acid fantasies of Robert Crumb in BIG ASS COMICS. A new generation of strange mythical beasts and creatures drifted through the pages of underground comix as political reality clashed with science fantasy.

Yesterday's fantasies tend to become today's realities. It took hundreds of animators years to create SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS and GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. Today computers can animate in nanoseconds. When I was a kid, I used to type up little stories on small colored slips of paper and draw illustrations for the stories. Today I create a file in Word and if I want to spend the time I can easily produce and publish my own book. What I could not dream of doing in the forties is now taken for granted. My early newsletters were produced on an old Underwood portable typewriter and printed by Postal Instant Press on an offset press. Today I typeset the newsletter in Word and run it on a state of the art Xerox machine. It takes about five minutes to print the newsletter. Several years worth of articles along with my mailing list and correspondance files fit on a Sony

disc I keep in my shirt pocket. I can carry a couple of novels in progress around and stop in at any computer rental place and write when the mood hits me. As a kid I would have thought all of this the most impossible fantasy imaginable--magic. In my childhood, phonograph records were big and you played them on a heavy machine and the selection of music was fairly small and uniform. Today anyone can carry a few dozen favorite songs on cassette tapes and listen to them on a machine that fits easily into a shirt or skirt pocket. I always enjoyed Dick Tracy and Batman, because they were up on the latest technological magic. Tracy started out with a two-way wrist radio, went to a tv, and now wears a wrist computer, but what was once comic strip stuff is now real. If you want a wrist t-v, Casio makes one you can buy. I would have loved one of those micro-tvs as a boy, but my eyes aren't that good today, so I have to pass.

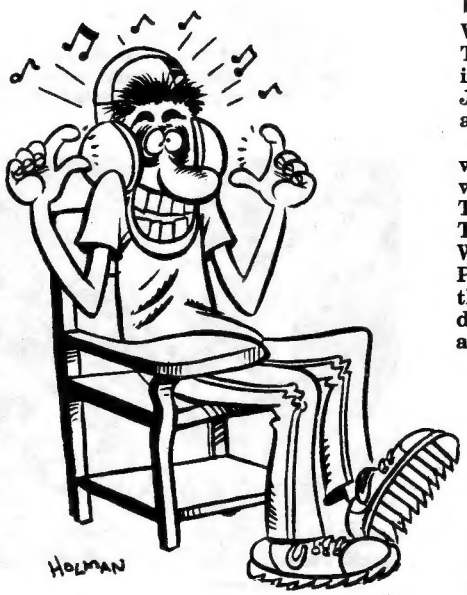
I'd like to say that some things that are magic are likely to remain that way forever, but two or three hundred years down the line someone would contradict me. I doubt that anyone will be able to invent a transporter a la the one on the Enterprise in STAR TREK. It's unlikely anyone will ever travel through time. I don't think the dead return as they do in teen slasher films. I think they just decay and return to earth. The entire cryogenics trip makes me laugh. People paying fortunes to have themselves frozen so they can be revived in the deep future when medical science has perfected cures for the cancers that killed them. What a joke. Who would want to return to life a hundred years in the future? For what? To be a freak on display in a museum? Woody Allen's SLEEPER was a funny movie, but it was also the ultimate horror fantasy.

It was the remembrance of magic past that lead George Lucas to STAR WARS in 1975. It was no accident that the four main characters were closely analogous to the quartet that went to the Emerald City of Oz. Magic has a lot of appeal in the type of world that has developed in our time, a world overpopulated and exploited. Reality is not pleasant and it is usually evaded by the evening news which is rarely anything but carefully structured entertainment . In the real world, Indiana Jones and James Bond die young, fashion models are more likely to be gay than sleeping with spies, and justice rarely traps the guilty. I just read Debbie Reynolds autobiography and she said she hired one of the top accounting agencies in Los Angeles to handle the money on her Broadway show, IRENE. When she wrote a check on the account, it returned for insufficient funds and la Reynolds found that the woman assigned to her account had stolen not just a few dollars, but the entire amount. $160,000. So the firm had her arrested and fired her, you think? Not a bit of it. They not only didn't fire her. They forced Reynolds to sue them for the money and they fought the case in court. They lost eventually, but they kept the criminal. There's a nice example for young people.

Magic is different. We know when Bond goes after a criminal, no lawyer is going to protect him or her from justice. It's easy to understand why wish-fulfillment fantasies like LETHAL WEAPON sell so well. They provide a momentary satisfaction for the ordinary person who feels helpless in the face of the kind of blatant corruption that now rules on Wall Street and in Washington. That's why BATMAN was a failure in my estimation. A psycho like The Joker is not our problem. Financiers and politicians are.

Expect another decade of magic with half the world at war. We'll be watching DICK TRACY and THE TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES in 1990 and hey, Wonder Woman will be 50 in 1991 along with Plastic Man and gee, we can have all these great cartoon movies and drinking cups and towels and badges and bubble-gum cards.

What, me worry?



Minicomix are a good way to learn the business end of comix without spending the family fortune. It's fun. You get into print immediately, link up with other cartoonists and fans, and get to have your own shoebox collection of some of the weirdest art being produced in the underground of the eighties.